

are gay, but because gays suffer intense job-related discrimination. At public hearings on the gay civil rights bill, Intro 475, in October 1971, Victor Gotbaum, president of District Council 37 of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, said that the executive council of his union had voted to endorse the bill because "no individual should have to face discrimination that would interfere with the ability to work."

The social and political "weight" of the gay liberation struggle is that of potentially millions in struggle against capitalist society. Such "weight" is not negligible by any standards.

This section of the memorandum appears to be designed less to provide a theoretical guide to relating to the gay movement than a rationalization for not actively intervening in the gay liberation struggle. This becomes especially clear in the context of the memorandum's assertion that the movement is "much more peripheral" to the "central issues of the class struggle" than either the women's movement or the movements of the oppressed nationalities.

### *An Argument for Abstention*

The discussion of this allegedly "peripheral" relationship of gay liberation to the class struggle (and therefore to the activities of the revolutionary party that intervenes in the class struggle) is, again, not an analysis but merely an assertion on the part of the memorandum. While it should be obvious that homosexuals, organized or not, are not going to play the central role in overthrowing capitalism and establishing socialism, having made such an observation does not bring the party any closer to understanding how to relate to the living struggle today. Unless, of course, we are to think that that living struggle is unimportant and unrelated to the long-term goal of overthrowing capitalism. The memorandum straddles the fence on this question: While it stops short of saying that gay liberation is of no importance whatever, it makes clear that it regards it as having very little importance—indeed, that it is "much more peripheral" than the other movements we seek to relate to.

Translated, this means that the opportunities within the gay movement for recruiting, isolating opponents, building mass actions, getting out our ideas, etc., are not considered valid arguments for our party's getting actively involved in gay liberation. What matters is only that the movement is considered "peripheral" to our "long-term strategic priorities." This is not an objective evaluation of the possibilities of this movement; it is an argument for abstention. It is an attempt to de-prioritize gay liberation right out of the running.

One question is worth asking here. Is gay liberation "peripheral" to the millions of homosexually oriented persons? Of course not, it is of central importance to them; it is fighting for their right to be free of the terrible oppression they suffer. It represents their struggle to live in dignity.

Is this a relevant consideration? We think so. For characterizing the gay liberation struggle as "peripheral" to our activities holds considerable implications for the party. It will mean, in practice, that we will find it very difficult, if not impossible, to recruit gay activists to the party. If they do not find their struggle for liberation "peripheral," they will be forced to choose between re-

maining in the gay movement and joining the revolutionary movement. This is an unnecessary and incorrect choice for the party to offer potential gay recruits. Instead, we should be offering them a program of struggle and a clear commitment to gay liberation that leaves no doubt about our recognition of the validity of the gay struggle in the overall struggle to make a socialist revolution.

Just what does the memorandum mean when it says that gay liberation is "much more peripheral to the central issues of the class struggle"? Is the struggle against sexual oppression and for sexual freedom in this category? Does this statement, in fact, not reflect an adaptation to prevailing backward consciousness on sexual matters? Is the memorandum suggesting that oppressed persons struggling against their sexual oppression should get out of that line of endeavor and into some more "central issue of the class struggle"? If so, what? Or does it mean to imply only that the revolutionary party should stand aside and simply let such people "do their thing" as a sort of sideshow on the periphery of the *real* class struggle?

This approach inevitably leads to an abstract and sterile effort at balancing various oppressions and "weighing" them against one another, and ultimately to a tendency to regard commitment to struggle against an allegedly "peripheral" form of oppression as a sign of personal indulgence more than political wisdom. It leads to rigidity rather than flexibility, to an attempt to force the living class struggle (of which the struggle for gay liberation is an integral part) into a preordained schema. Would a more intelligent approach for revolutionists be to relate to the gay liberation struggle with Marxism and a class struggle method and attempt to bring it to revolutionary consciousness, lead it in a revolutionary direction, and integrate it into the overall struggle to overthrow capitalism?

In addition to stressing that the gay liberation struggle is "peripheral" to the central issues of the class struggle, the memorandum makes the observation that it does not raise "such a central issue of world politics as the struggle against imperialist wars." It is, of course true that gay liberation does not raise the issue of imperialist war, but then that is true of most struggles. But is it true that it raises no central issue of world politics? Probably, for now at least. But this is true of a number of other movements too. Women's liberation, for instance, which, while becoming increasingly important throughout the world as a political issue, still has quite a ways to go before it could pass the memorandum's test. Gay liberation is doubtless behind women's liberation—it got going later, in fewer traditions to fall back on, and has to buck more deeply engrained prejudices, including within the radical movement and even the revolutionary left. But who can deny that it has made considerable, and rapid, progress? And who would be reckless enough to predict that it will not become such an issue? Certainly the causes of homosexual oppression are endemic to enough of the world's societies and cultures for Marxists to see a potential for it to develop into a significant international political issue.

Nevertheless, gay liberation raises issues that call into question major institutions of class society, bourgeois



the revolutionary morality, and the bureaucracies of the workers states. A struggle with such a thrust is not unrelated to the central issues of world politics.

We regard the line of argument used in the memorandum as somewhat arbitrary and misleading when it comes to providing an analysis of the relationship of gay liberation to the class struggle. It should go without saying that gay liberation is different from other struggles. It raises different issues (as well as similar ones). Is this a drawback? It presents both opportunities and difficulties that no other movement presents. And it is important to be aware of these distinctions. But it is also important not to fall into the error of attempting to force gay liberation to fit into preconceived molds, and then use its failure to conform as an argument for not becoming actively involved in it.

The vagueness of the formulations in the memorandum may fool some comrades into thinking that its characterization of gay liberation as "peripheral" is only an objective description or statement of fact. In reality, however, the logic of where it leads can be seen in the Draft Political Resolution (SWP Discussion Bulletin Vol. 31 No. 13, p. 15). In rejecting "workerist" shortcuts to the working class, it defines "workerism" as "the rejection of the various social movements that have developed in the course of the radicalization, discounting them as *peripheral* or as obstacles to the proletarian revolution or workers struggles." (Emphasis added) Presumably this argument could be directed against the memorandum itself for its "discounting" of the gay liberation movement as "peripheral." Should the memorandum's approach to gay liberation be characterized as "workerist"?

The Political Resolution, in its lengthy discussion of the evolution of the radicalization and of the "various movements" that have been a part of it, makes no mention whatever of gay liberation. Either this means that gay liberation is not considered to be a part of the radicalization by the resolution, or it is viewed as a movement that is so "peripheral" that it does not warrant or deserve analysis. How does this differ from the "workerist" approach toward gay liberation? The slighting of gay liberation in the Political Resolution would appear to be a logical outgrowth of the approach taken in the memorandum.

#### *An Unexplained About-Face*

This characterization of the gay liberation struggle as "peripheral" is new in the 1973 preconvention discussion. It is, in fact, the polar opposite of the characterization included in Comrade Gus Horowitz's introduction to *Towards An American Socialist Revolution* (p. 15). So great and startling is the contrast that his comments merit being quoted at length:

"Under capitalism, side by side with the exploitation of the working class, there also exist new forms of long-term oppression, the reactionary institutional and ideological remnants of a precapitalist era; the oppression of women and nationalities, religious superstition, the persecution of homosexuals, reactionary social morality, restrictions on civil liberties and human rights are but a few examples. These have become instruments for upholding the present system and cannot be eliminated within its framework.

As a result, the coming American revolution will have to accomplish an entire range of historically overdue democratic tasks, as well as socialist tasks, such as nationalization of industry under working-class control. . . .

"... these new movements are *not unimportant or peripheral* to the socialist revolution, but *at the center of its advance*. Furthermore, they have all developed independent of the ruling-class institutions, and they are free from domination by the Communist Party and the trade-union bureaucracy. The political thrust of their demands is directed against the ruling class and *in the interests of the great mass of American workers*. So, far from diminishing in importance as the labor movement itself radicalizes, these movements will grow and continue to be a *key part* of the general process leading to a socialist revolution. To think otherwise is to think that the radicalizing layers of the working class will be completely incapable of identifying with feminism, Black nationalism, gay liberation and progressive standards of social morality. If that were the case, there would be no prospect of the working class identifying with the goals of a socialist revolution." (Emphasis added)

Why this about-face on gay liberation? Has the National Committee come across new information in the intervening period of time that justifies it? Certainly it could not lie in the gay movement itself, which is growing, not diminishing. Or was Comrade Horowitz's assessment of gay liberation overly enthusiastic and misguided? Such a radical shift in the assessment of the role of gay liberation in the struggle for socialism as the one embodied in the memorandum needs to be explained.

#### *How to 'Reflect' Something Relatively Unimportant*

Having defined gay liberation into very limited potential mass, the outer periphery of the class struggle and world politics, and near weightlessness, the memorandum proceeds to give an idea of how this grasp of gay liberation would be reflected in the activities and propaganda of the party: "Our propaganda, our election campaigns, *The Militant*, our forums, etc., must reflect the relative weight and importance of the gay liberation movement compared to other movements and issues of more central importance." What we should be "concentrating on," it cautions, are the "big questions" of the class struggle, not little ones like movements to fight sexual oppression. Fearful that gay liberation might be reflected too much in the above activities, it warns against placing "equal emphasis upon the struggle of women or Blacks and that of 'gay people.'" What do these cautions really mean?

In practice, they will have an overly conservatizing effect on the way comrades regard gay liberation. They will place in the forefront of the minds of comrades on the editorial staffs of our publications, organizers, executive committees, campaign directors, etc., considerations like "Is this going too far?", "Is this doing too much?", "Is this giving the impression that we do not, in fact, view gay liberation as 'peripheral' and relatively unimportant?", "Can we really afford the time, space, and effort to undertake this or that gay liberation-related project?", etc., etc. They will create an atmosphere in which comrades who press for our movement to take advantage of opportunities in gay liberation will end up being discouraged from do-



ing so.

These cautions put the finishing touches on a process that has been going on for more than two years, during which the party has progressively pulled further and further away from any involvement in gay liberation and from anything more than half-hearted efforts at news coverage in our press.

They suggest that there may have even been too much attention paid to gay liberation in our press, forums, election campaigns, etc. This, however, stands things on their head. In reality, there has not been nearly enough. This can already be seen in the fact that articles on important gay actions, such as gay pride demonstrations, etc., are now no longer even automatically sent into *The Militant*. Since *The Militant* is usually pressed for space, even when such articles are sent in in the future, they can be expected to be boiled down into short blurbs in the "In Brief" column.

Two years ago, for a period of a few months, our press took a different approach toward the developing gay struggle. Rather than applying brakes to a healthy desire on the part of revolutionists to help publicize and advance this new struggle of the oppressed, we encouraged comrades to report on gay events in their areas. We even ran a few feature-length articles on the nature of gay oppression, the nature of homosexuality, etc. Gay liberation was frequently, if not regularly, discussed in *Militant* staff meetings. Special discussions were held on *The Militant* staff about running a feature article for the issue to be sold at the June 1971 gay pride marches. All this was seen not as an overreaction to the gay struggle, but as an absolute minimum of what could be expected from revolutionists who had just discarded their policy banning homosexuals from membership and who were not yet involved in gay liberation.

The brakes were quickly applied, however, and since then it has been downhill for coverage of gay liberation in *The Militant*. *The Militant* sold at this year's gay pride marches had no special article on gay liberation, for instance.

While the memorandum suggests that there is a danger of giving equal emphasis to gay liberation, as compared to other movements, the real danger is the trend toward virtually eliminating gay liberation as an important and valid issue for our press and propaganda. This can be seen, for instance, in comparing the coverage of gay liberation and other struggles during the past two years.

In 1971, there were 33 articles on gay liberation in *The Militant*, and 32 mentions in "In Brief." Women's liberation received 370 articles, Black liberation 180. In 1972, gay liberation had fallen to only 12 articles, whereas women's liberation and Black liberation received more than 200 each. Moreover, since the first part of 1971 there have been no feature articles whatever on gay liberation, no polemical articles defending our party from the dozens of attacks in the gay press (apparently on the principle that to defend the party from such attacks would give the misleading impression that we cared to reach the gays who are misled by them with the truth, or that we considered the gay movement anything but "peripheral"), and no analytical articles—only news stories and a handful of book reviews. Our publishing house still has not published a single piece of literature on gay liberation, despite the fact that the Publications Committee

voted more than two years ago to do so.

The memorandum not only ratifies this trend, but is proposing a continuation of the status quo. The problem is not one of avoiding placing equal emphasis on gay liberation; the problem is one of reversing a trend toward relating to gay liberation on token levels, or even ignoring it altogether. Supporters of the memorandum who think it may be proposing to actively relate to gay liberation in our propaganda are dreaming with their eyes open.

#### *What About the State of the Gay Movement?*

The memorandum goes on to present an astonishingly misleading picture of the state of the gay movement nationally. It is so superficial, and even inaccurate, that it could only have been drafted in a near total absence of familiarity with the gay movement and without any consultation with comrades who have some knowledge of the matter. (For a more accurate and rounded view see "For an Intervention Into the Gay Liberation Struggle," by Kendall Green and David Thorstad, SWP Discussion Bulletin Vol. 31, No. 15.)

The memorandum has a lot to say about what the gay movement is not, but very little to say about what it is. Even what it does say on these points, however, is misleading.

The central core of its argumentation is that there is no national group or focus of gay liberation, and that this constitutes an argument in favor of our not becoming involved. It states: "The gay liberation movement is at present very diffuse, not organized into any single grouping or action front on a national scale." And: "Since the 1972 party literary discussion on the gay liberation movement, there has been no significant steps toward the formation of a national framework of gay liberation organizations or a national focus of action by gay liberation groups. In fact, the direction seems to be the opposite at this time, with such a national focus or organization less likely."

There are a number of things wrong with this assessment.

1) It is misleading to say that there is no national framework of gay liberation organizations. There is, for example, the National Coalition of Gay Organizations (NCGO), founded in February 1972, and its regional affiliates, as well as groups like the Southern California Council of Gay Student Unions, with chapters on nineteen campuses, most of which meet weekly or biweekly.

Moreover, the gay liberation movement has held various national gatherings. These include conferences in Austin in March 1971, Madison in November 1971, and Chicago in February 1972 (out of which NCGO was formed). The Kent State Gay Liberation Front has issued a call for a national conference in May 1974 to discuss national perspectives for the movement. In addition, gays have begun to organize national caucuses within certain organizations, such as the National Education Association and the American Library Association.

More than 1,200 women from 36 states attended a West Coast Lesbian Conference in Los Angeles in April, where our comrades sold \$1,100 worth of literature.

Furthermore, it is not true to imply that gay organizations do not have a national outlook. In 1971, New York GAA organized two tours of the South and the



Midwest with the specific aim of helping to set up new gay organizations and collaborate with already existing groups. Members of GAA/NY went to Cleveland, Detroit, Columbus, Kalamazoo, Milwaukee, Chicago, Minneapolis, Des Moines, Indianapolis, New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Miami, Gainesville, Tallahassee, Tampa, Nashville, and Washington, D. C. The October 1971 issue of GAA's newsletter, *Gay Activist*, termed these tours "without question, two of the most successful performances to date on behalf of gay liberation."

In 1972, NCGO organized a nationwide effort to bring gays to Miami to demonstrate at the Democratic and Republican party conventions.

*The Advocate*, a gay newspaper published in Los Angeles, reports on gay movement activities across the country and has a national circulation of around 35,000.

Although there has not been any national campaign organized by any single national grouping, this should not be taken to mean that there has been no gay activity on a national scale. Annual gay pride weeks and Christopher Street Liberation Day marches have spread across the country (and around the world). Last year demonstrations were held in New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, Atlanta, among other cities. This year's actions included a march of some 15,000 in New York—one of the larger protest actions there in the recent period.

Is the gay movement as diffuse as the memorandum suggests?

2) The memorandum presents the absence of a national organization as a key factor in determining whether or not we should nationally intervene in the gay movement. This is a criterion that is not invoked in the case of other movements in which we intervene. The Draft Political Resolution states, for instance, with regard to the women's movement: "There is no national organization or group of organizations that encompasses and organizes the growing willingness of women to struggle for their rights. Most of the feminist groups are local formations." (p. 11) Yet the resolution proposes continued involvement in women's liberation groups on a national scale and discusses several important struggles in which it recommends that we participate.

Similarly, the Chicano movement has no single consistent national focus and no one national organization to which we allocate our forces. Until relatively recently, with activity around African Liberation Day and the African Liberation Support Committee, the same could be said about the Black liberation movement.

We do not therefore characterize these movements as not being national in scope, nor do we propose relating to them without any national guidelines for doing so. Whatever organizational links or avenues for formal collaboration may or may not exist within them on a national scale, the fact is that each of these movements has a certain dynamic and raises the same basic issues in every state and city where it exists. Why should the gay liberation movement be regarded any differently?

Clearly, the gay liberation movement is not something that has appeared in city after city through sheer coincidence. Whether it be New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, Phil-

adelphia, Washington, D. C., Minneapolis, Miami Beach, or wherever, it is a movement that voices the demands of gay people for an end to their oppression. Its political tasks, therefore, are national (and international) in scope, and a whole series of strategic and political questions have arisen, and will continue to arise, that are national in character.

We conduct national interventions into the Black movement, the Chicano movement, and the women's liberation movement. This means a number of things. Our political orientation toward these movements, and our political tasks in them, are decided on a national level—by conventions. The work we carry out in them is done under the guidance of the national center. Our press covers and actively intervenes in these movements on a regular basis, carrying news reports on their activities, as well as analytical articles concerning important questions facing them. Our publications programs are geared toward putting out materials useful for intervening in them and bringing Marxism to these layers of the oppressed.

The same kind of approach should be taken toward the gay liberation movement.

3) While enlisting the criterion that there is no central national organization in the gay liberation movement as an argument for not intervening on a national scale is wrong to start with, it appears to be designed to serve less as a statement of fact about the gay movement than as an excuse for proposing no intervention. It clarifies nothing, and serves to divert attention from the real issue, which is how the party, as a national organization, should relate to the gay liberation struggle.

4) The memorandum states that rather than motion toward a national "framework of gay liberation organizations" or a national focus for gay groups, the trend "seems to be the opposite at this time, with such a national focus or organization less likely." "Less likely" than what? Than a year ago? Than two years ago? What is the basis for the assertion that such motion is "less likely"? We know of nothing upon which such a prediction could be based. What evidence is there for it?

This assertion appears to us to be based less on fact than on a desire to lend weight to the subsequent proposal that the party not actively intervene in the movement by making the proposal appear more "realistic." But how can one realistically make a judgment so long as no basis for the assertion is provided?

Despite the fact that the memorandum sees no evolution toward a national organization, it has discerned an evolution of a sector of the gay movement "in an ultraleft and inward-turned direction." This sector, it finds, "became part of the broader ultraleft and commune-oriented youth current. In some areas, this process resulted in the virtual disappearance of any viable organized expression of the gay liberation movement."

Again, just what, concretely, is the basis for this analysis? Is it the evolution and, in many cases, disappearance of the early Gay Liberation Fronts that the memorandum is referring to? If so, it is an exaggeration to state that their orientation toward ultraleftism and counterculturalism has led in many cases to the disappearance of any "viable organized expression of the gay liberation movement." Generally, they have simply disappeared and other groups have taken over.



And while there has been a definite growth, on a national scale, of gay churches, these bodies have drawn their members not from the already existing gay movement so much as from the diehard heterosexual churches. Presumably it is not their particular form of counterculturalism that the memorandum has in mind.

What about areas where the opposite of the process described in the memorandum has occurred? Where ultra-leftist, countercultural gay groups have disappeared and other political-action organizations have filled the vacuum they left, or where counterculturalism and political activism coexist? The memorandum strives to give the impression that New York's GAA is one of the "notable exceptions" to this alleged process. GAA's exceptional status, according to the memorandum, lies in the fact that it "has continued to carry out activities directed against gay oppression." This, however, is a highly distorted and misleading portrait of the gay liberation movement.

Perhaps the authors of the memorandum have information that we do not. If so, we would appreciate it if they would present that information to the party as a whole so that the party could make an informed decision on this question.

Far from disappearing, new groups have continued to spring up all across the country; the current GAA mailing list includes more than 600 groups in the United States. The "notable exception" is not that of gay groups that "continue to carry out activities directed against gay oppression," as the memorandum claims. The "notable exception" is a major city or campus without a functioning gay liberation group fighting gay oppression.

The National Committee has also discerned "somewhat of a dropping off of struggles for the rights of gay people in the past period." This is such a preposterous assertion as to spark incredulity among readers at all familiar with the gay liberation movement. The pages of the gay press have been filled with all kinds of struggles for gay rights during the past two years. If anything, there has been an increase in such struggles. Comrades whose only source of information on this is *The Militant* might at first be inclined to find the memorandum's assertion reasonable. That may be because the real "dropping off" has been in the coverage given to gay liberation struggles by the party press, but this appears to us to have been prompted by internal considerations, not by an attempt to reflect the real state of the gay movement.

Naturally, we are all aware of the fact that there is a general lull in the various movements of the radicalization. If the memorandum had wanted to indicate that this lull has also affected the gay liberation movement, it should have said so. However, if it meant to imply that the gay liberation movement, because of some inherent or special peculiarity, is less active now than before, it should have presented some evidence to back up such an assertion. For our part, we do not believe that evidence to back it up exists.

#### *Our Tasks — According to the Memorandum*

Based on its pessimistic and conservative view of the gay liberation movement's potential, its failure to forthrightly reject the notion that homosexuality is inferior to heterosexuality, and its somewhat fictionalized account of the current state of the movement, the memorandum proposes that "we should not attempt to carry out a na-

tional party intervention" or "project a national party campaign on this question at the present time"; that "we should make no reallocation of our forces to generally assign comrades to this movement"; and that "our support to the movement will be mainly in our propaganda in the near period, as it has been." On a local level, it proposes where gay rights struggles, "such as demonstrations, defense cases, etc., occur, the party should support them."

We disagree with these proposals for a number of reasons, and believe that their adoption would lead, in practice, to virtually no involvement by the party in gay liberation.

1) While we agree that no national party campaign should be projected, we think that it is incorrect to suggest that our relationship to the gay liberation movement should be left up to local branches without any national guidelines or guidance. This, essentially, would be to regard the party as a federation of local groups that would do their thing in gay liberation—if they felt like it, and if it did not go beyond the line laid down in the memorandum.

We think that the party nationally must have an orientation of intervening actively in the gay liberation movement, just as, for instance, we have a national orientation toward intervening actively in the women's liberation movement. The fact that the intervention would take the form of different kinds of activities depending on the local area in no way changes the fact that these activities are part of a national intervention in the gay liberation movement. It simply means that we should be flexible in deciding what kinds of activities to concentrate on in local areas.

The counterresolution "For an Intervention Into the Gay Liberation Struggle" provides an analysis of the state of the gay movement, a discussion of the kinds of activities and struggles it has tended to carry out and can be expected to continue to carry out, and a proposal on the kinds of actions that we should be involved in and help build. To take one example: It includes a proposal that our party nationally orient toward "propagandizing in favor of, and building united fronts around law-repeal campaigns on a statewide level, where appropriate." It does not propose to attempt to build such united fronts in states where it is not appropriate or where there is no real sentiment within the gay movement for doing so. This does not mean that we should simply sit back and wait until the gay movement of its own accord sets up such a united front, and then "support" it, "mainly in our propaganda," which would appear to be the approach suggested by the memorandum. No. It means that our comrades should seek out possibilities for building such united fronts and where good possibilities exist, we should actively help to build them.

We think that building struggles to repeal the laws would be a good thing, and we think that the party should be oriented nationally toward just such kinds of interventions into the gay liberation struggle.

What we do not propose is the formation, at this time, of a national group or a national campaign around the issue of law repeal. To do so would be artificial, premature, and amount to substituting ourselves for the gay movement.

Not proposing these things, however, does not mean that we should have no national orientation toward building



ing and intervening in the gay liberation struggle. To the proposal of the memorandum that we "should not attempt to carry out a national intervention" into the gay liberation struggle, we counterpose the approach that we indeed *should* attempt to carry out a national intervention into the gay liberation struggle. The form that intervention will take will vary according to the situation in the various areas in which the party exists. But we propose that the party as a whole, nationally, actively intervene in and help build the gay liberation struggle.

We should, moreover, actively intervene in national conferences of the gay movement with our ideas on how to build the gay movement, and with our press and publications—including publications on gay liberation-related subjects.

Comrades who agree with this approach should support the Thorstad-Green counterresolution.

2) The proposal to make "no reallocation of our forces to generally assign comrades to this movement" will lead to assigning no comrades to actively work in the gay movement. If the memorandum is adopted, it will be taken by the leadership of the party that is elected to carry out the decisions adopted by the convention as an argument against assigning any comrades to gay liberation. This proposal would make any direct intervention or involvement in gay liberation virtually impossible. It would lead to the party being in no way directly involved in building the gay struggle.

3) Limiting our support to our propaganda is an altogether inadequate proposal that is made even more inadequate by stressing that this should be the case in the future "as it has been." Our treatment of gay liberation in our propaganda, as we have seen, has moved toward being nothing more than occasional news articles. The memorandum essentially ratifies this trend and will serve as a brake against doing any more than this. Comrades who may regard this proposal as one for a "propaganda intervention" are reading into the memorandum something that it does not say.

4) This memorandum proposes no intervention into gay liberation. While it may "leave open the possibility" of doing something (not defined), as some of its supporters are fond of stressing, it is sheer sophistry to argue that because it does not specifically propose *not* to do something that therefore it proposes to do it.

At best, what the memorandum proposes is that the party "support" some actions on a local level by running news articles in our press on them. Not allocating forces to the movement would make any active involvement in the actions virtually impossible.

But the fact that the memorandum includes no discussion whatever of any specific struggles and issues in the gay movement suggests that its statement that we should "support" such struggles where they occur is not meant to be taken as a serious admonition. A number of struggles for gay rights have been going on for quite some time, can be expected to continue, and are of considerable significance to gays. There is no need to wait for them to "occur." One such struggle is that in New York City to get the city council to adopt the civil rights bill Intro 475. The nature of this struggle, which has been going on for more than two years, was discussed in the Thor-

stad-Green counterresolution. Just how serious the memorandum is in attempting to orient the party toward "supporting" such local struggles can be seen in the fact that the Intro 475 struggle, which has national, and even international, significance in the gay movement, is not even mentioned in the memorandum. Why? Is it because to have done so might have given the comrades in New York the impression that they in fact *ought* to be involved in fighting for a victory in this struggle? Well, shouldn't they?

Moreover, during the plenum itself, Intro 475 was defeated for the third time in the city council. The defeat sent shock waves and outrage through the New York gay community. Protests were staged, and special strategy meetings held to discuss how to fight back. The reformists in the leadership of the New York movement, however, did not attempt to carry through a real campaign on the issue, and there was no effective alternative leadership that could challenge them. Neither the defeat, nor the Intro 475 struggle in general, was even mentioned by the plenum that nevertheless adopted this proposal that the party "support" local struggles "where they occur."

5) The whole tone and analysis of the memorandum, and the thrust of its proposals, will have the effect of encouraging comrades to look with skepticism upon proposals to do anything with regard to gay liberation. Rather than encourage branch executive committees to seek ways to get involved in building the gay liberation struggle, it will tend to turn them into a kind of watchdog to make sure that comrades don't go beyond the inadequate outlines of the memorandum. Rather than gay liberation becoming an area of intervention with potential and opportunities for us to make gains, it will—having been relegated to "peripheral" status and low priority—tend to become regarded as an area in which party involvement poses actual threats to properly carrying out "the major campaigns being conducted by the party."

6) These proposals will tend to have the effect of demoting gay liberation from being a political issue to a personal question for gay comrades, for they will lead to a dichotomy between commitment to the struggle for gay liberation and commitment to the struggle for socialism. They will result in a kind of political schizophrenia for gay comrades. A better approach would be to actively attempt to relate the struggle for gay liberation to the struggle for socialism.

7) The implementation of these proposals, and the adoption of this memorandum, would make it virtually impossible to recruit gay activists. Gays will tend to view the party's support to gay liberation as verbal; and the sincerity of even the verbal support will seem hollow in the absence of any serious effort to build the gay struggle.

With this memorandum, it would become our responsibility to explain to potential recruits the position that gay liberation is "peripheral" to the "big questions" of the class struggle. Aside from the incorrect formulation of that assertion, the superficiality of the memorandum's analysis will provide comrades with a poor theoretical basis for explaining it. In practice, it will tend to be translated as simply, "Gay liberation is really not so impor-



tant."

While our position in favor of full civil and human rights for gays has won us respect among many gay activists, and continues to differentiate us from many reformist and left-wing opponents, putting forward the position that gay liberation is "peripheral," and using this assertion as an argument against getting actively involved in gay liberation, would have a catastrophic effect on the attitudes of gays toward the party. They would see this as a downgrading of their struggle, and they would be right. Some might even mistakenly decide that the revolutionary party is "peripheral." Such counterposing of the purposes of gay liberation and the party is inherent in the memorandum's approach.

Comrades who support the memorandum must be fully prepared to argue this position to gay activists and contacts of our movement. This will be a difficult, unnecessary, incorrect, thankless, and unfortunate task.

#### *And What About the YSA?*

A couple of years ago, it was generally assumed in the YSA that it would become actively involved in gay liberation. When the party began putting on the brakes in 1971, however, the YSA too began pulling back. With some effort, it has managed to keep the lid on while the party worked out its approach toward gay liberation. If the memorandum is adopted, and if the YSA follows the party's "lead" in this regard, it will probably not only be a great disappointment for many YSAers, but it can also be expected to have somewhat of a crippling effect on the YSA's appeal for large numbers of young people.

#### *Dress and Appearance?*

Gays and other comrades can be "justifiably suspicious" of the NC's inclusion of a point on "the party attitude concerning dress and appearance of comrades" in a memorandum on the gay liberation movement.

Since, as the memorandum admits, "This question and others related to it go beyond a discussion of the gay liberation movement, raising a more general question . . .," why is a discussion of this "general question" included here?

The explicit justification—that this issue was raised in the literary discussion—is spurious. A whole range of issues and information raised in the literary discussion has been left aside by the memorandum. Why has this issue—which Comrade Betsey Stone correctly labeled a "side issue" in her literary discussion article (Discussion Bulletin Vol. 30, No. 8)—been selected as one worthy of mention by the NC in a discussion of gay liberation?

If the NC believes that there are particular problems resulting from adaptation to ultraleft or countercultural currents in the gay movement, then it should have forthrightly identified these as such and dealt with them. Instead, the memorandum implies that gays in particular project "an exotic image of the party" in their peculiar dress or by engaging in sexual activities at party socials. The approach of the memorandum contrasts starkly with the approach of Comrade Stone when she took up adaptation to countercultural currents in the women's movement. Her report to the March 1971 plenum appears in Internal Information Bulletin No. 2 in 1971.

The relevant sections, on pages 9-14, not only begin with an acknowledgement of the *positive* impact of feminism on women comrades' self-confidence, but they are exceedingly specific and free of the provocative vagueness contained in the April 29, 1973, memorandum. Moreover, the problems she was dealing with were far more widespread and serious than any of which we are aware in connection with the gay liberation movement.

The implication of this section confuses the desire to see the party take a correct stand on prejudiced and homosexual "theories" with the alleged demand that the party rank the personal sexual preferences of comrades against each other, and it confuses the political movement for gay liberation with counterculturalism—a confusion running through the whole document.

Furthermore, the implication that gays are freaks who will give the party an "exotic" image, that gays can control themselves at social functions, and that all women's activities look dangerously lesbian (sick) to straight (healthy) women serves to intimidate comrades. It flies in the face of the PC's statement in its motion of May 25, 1971, that "No pressure from the party should be placed on any comrade either for or against them openly declaring themselves as gay."

#### *For a Point on the Agenda*

The memorandum concludes with the thought that since it is proposing no national campaign in gay liberation, there is "no need" for a separate point on the convention agenda on the question of our relationship to and analysis of gay liberation. We disagree entirely.

First, the question of how the party should relate to gay liberation has not been an unimportant one for the party. Indeed, it has taken around three years to reach the present point where a proposal is being made by a leading body of the party. In the course of those three years, it has become clear that there is considerable disagreement within the party, including within the leadership, as to what approach should be taken. The best way to help clarify the issues would be to schedule a separate point during which the counterpositions embodied in the memorandum and the Thorstad-Green counter-resolution could be defended alongside one another, in front of the party as a whole, and voted on.

Second, this will be the first time that the party rank will have had an opportunity to vote on a line on gay liberation. We think that they should be given an opportunity to cast their votes from a position of full awareness and understanding of the issues involved. This requires a special point on the agenda.

Third, it is possible that the proposal not to schedule a separate point was made with an understanding that should significant opposition to the memorandum develop during the course of the preconvention period the proposal could be revised. We hope so. We believe that such opposition has arisen and that there is enough support for the Thorstad-Green resolution within the party to warrant a separate point for discussion.

Fourth, we fear that no scheduling a separate point might give the impression that the matter was being swept under the rug. Such an impression would be harmful to the party. We would like to see it avoided.



### What Are the Major Differences?

What are the main points on which we disagree with the memorandum, and to which the resolution "For an Intervention Into the Gay Liberation Struggle" by David Thorstad and Kendall Green is being counterposed?

1) The memorandum is, in many places, vague, inaccurate, and open to different interpretations—including completely opposite interpretations. As a result, it has the effect of papering over and obscuring political differences, not clarifying them. This is the explanation for the fact that it has attracted support from comrades with sharply conflicting assessments of the nature of gay oppression, whether gay liberation can be achieved within the framework of capitalism, the nature of the party's relationship to the gay liberation struggle, and even the key question of whether the party should be involved in gay liberation at all. A document open to such widely differing and contradictory interpretations hardly constitutes a serious basis for deciding the important question before the party regarding gay liberation.

2) The memorandum does not clearly and forthrightly reject the idea that homosexuality is inferior to heterosexuality—that it is a psychological, physiological, or historical aberration. While it rejects the notion that gays should be labelled as mentally ill, it leaves open the door to arguments that homosexuality may be the product of other kinds of disturbances or of class society. Its claim to reject prejudice is nullified by its own assertion that in matters of homosexuality it cannot determine what is prejudice and what is not. Its claim to reject the idea that gays are mentally ill conflicts with its subsequent insistence that the party not "take a stand" on the nature of homosexuality.

Nothing short of a clear and forthright recognition that homosexuality is not inferior to heterosexuality will do. Anything less would be to place a question mark over our commitment to achieving full human rights—as well as civil rights—for homosexually oriented persons and to the underlying thrust of the gay liberation struggle against society's exclusive heterosexual norm.

3) The memorandum's discussion of what it refers to as the "social weight" and "potential mass" of the gay liberation struggle is superficial and misleading, and its characterization of that struggle as "much more peripheral" to the class struggle is recklessly overstated and useless in attempting to orient the party toward properly relating to a new struggle of the oppressed. It puts forward these concepts without ever seriously attempting to define or explain them in relation to the gay liberation struggle, and it does so in terms so heavily laden with negativism and caution that the only conclusion one can draw is that it regards the gay liberation struggle as unimportant. Its arguments clearly lead away from involvement in gay liberation, rather than toward it.

4) It takes a civil-rights approach to gay liberation—supporting the rights of, and opposing discrimination against, gay people—but stops short of commitment to the underlying thrust of the gay liberation struggle, which is to win the full acceptance of homosexual behavior by society and the destruction of society's exclusive heterosexual norm.

5) Its proposal to "make no reallocation of our forces to generally assign comrades to this movement" is a clear rejection of the idea that our party should actively inter-

vene in and help build the gay liberation struggle. It is a proposal to reduce our "support" to gay liberation to "supporting" from the sidelines. We believe that the exact opposite must be done: The party should assign comrades to this movement to help build it and orient it along the lines suggested in the Thorstad-Green document. It should be clear that these assignments are part of a general, national orientation toward involvement in gay liberation, not something left up to the whims of individual branches.

The Thorstad-Green document proposes, and lays a basis for, an active intervention into the gay liberation movement. The NC memorandum does neither.

6) The memorandum appears to have a fixation on counterculturalism, thereby giving the impression that it regards the struggle against homosexual oppression and for gay liberation as inherently tending in an apolitical and countercultural direction. While no basis for such a view is provided in the memorandum—and indeed the idea is utterly without foundation—the pervading concern of the memorandum with counterculturalism represents a distortion of the true nature of the gay liberation struggle, and even a downgrading of that struggle.

7) The section dealing with "dress and decorum" of comrades has no place in a resolution on gay liberation. Its inclusion does two things: It suggests that this is a "gay problem," not a matter of general applicability to all comrades; and it trivializes what is ostensibly a political discussion on how the party should relate to gay liberation.

The whole tone of this section, moreover, is menacing and even intimidating.

8) We believe that the most serious and desirable way to resolve the issues raised by the memorandum and the Thorstad-Green resolution would be to set aside a separate point on the convention agenda for a full discussion and vote on the counterposed lines of the two documents.

### Conclusion

We need an aggressive orientation toward the gay liberation struggle, based on a full appreciation and correct analysis of gay oppression and of the movement. Such a basis is laid, we believe, in the counterresolution "For an Intervention Into the Gay Liberation Struggle" by David Thorstad and Kendall Green. By correctly appraising the importance and potential of the gay struggle, we stand to make gains in building the party itself.

As in other movements, we should educate and agitate within the gay movement for a strategy of mass action and independence from the institutions and parties of the capitalist system. This is the kind of strategy that will build the movement and win victories. We should argue for this perspective among gay activists and within the pages of our press.

In putting forward such a perspective on a consistent basis, we will win real respect for our party. Our revolutionary approach—including the living example of how socialists seriously and consistently work to build the movement and advance the struggle—will enable us to recruit serious gay activists, isolate and discredit our opponents, and write a new chapter in the history of the Marxist movement's championing of the struggles of the oppressed.

July 18, 1973



### Introduction

In coming to the decision that the orientation to the gay liberation movement embodied in the April 29, 1973, Memorandum on the Gay Liberation Movement (*Discussion Bulletin*, Vol. 31, No. 3) is not an adequate or correct one for the party, I reviewed the steps leading to the National Committee's decision. Going over this brief history convinced me that the record as most comrades are aware of it is incomplete. This article seeks to fill gaps in comrades' knowledge of how the party has proceeded to this point. It is written with the idea that looking at mistakes in the process that led to the memorandum will help to throw light on what is wrong with the NC's current attitude and proposals.

[Note: This article was drafted before I had received and read the Internationalist Tendency's counterresolution, "The Building of A Revolutionary Party in Capitalist America" (*DB*, Vol. 31, No. 18), which contains a distorted reference to some of the history covered here. The reference comes in the context of a sleazy appeal to gay comrades whom the Internationalist Tendency alleges have been treated in a "scandalous" manner by the party. Rather than rewrite this article to specifically answer distortions in the Internationalist Tendency's resolution, I am submitting it as originally drafted. A future brief article from one of the supporters of "For an Intervention Into the Gay Liberation Struggle" (*DB* Vol. 31, No. 15) will specifically take up distortions in the Internationalist Tendency's counterresolution.]

### Membership Policy: The Prelude

The Memorandum on Membership Policy, adopted Nov. 13, 1970 (printed as an Appendix in *DB*, Vol. 31, No. 3) refers to the party's and the YSA's "moving toward" proscribing homosexuals from membership, to an "evolution." While this is accurate, the evolution was pretty well advanced by the time the rise of the gay liberation movement prompted the party to stop to consider, motivate, and reaffirm the exclusion of homosexuals in the spring of 1970. Prior to 1970, most comrades referred to "the policy," and not to "the evolution."

Comrade Joel Britton presented the organizational report to the National Committee plenum, Feb. 27-March 1, 1970. It marked the first time the exclusion of homosexuals had been discussed by the NC. Presumably, in discussions preparatory to the plenum, this evolving policy was discussed for the first time by the Political Committee. Comrade Britton presented the exclusion of homosexuals as a matter of security, designed to protect the party from victimization. No one challenged the policy or the motivation for it.

However, one comrade did raise the question of whether there wasn't more involved than just opening the party to legal victimization. He pointed out (incorrectly) that there were no antihomosexual laws in Illinois. His comments provoked a loud, jocular, off-the-record jest from a central leader of the party: "That's because Daley is a homo!" It is not insignificant or beside the point that such a joke could be shouted out without a second thought.

Knowing this helps in grasping the context in which Comrade Britton presented his report. It adds dimension to the understanding of how the policy was able to originate and evolve for a decade. It should also help to temper discussion of the negative influences the gay liberation movement has had on the party. (That is, I do not consider it a wrong and dangerous adaptation to counterculturalism that party leaders no longer go around telling queer jokes.)

At the time Comrade Britton presented the policy to the National Committee for discussion and approval it was not at all uncommon to hear motivation for the policy that was at odds with what Comrade Britton presented. This is partly what Comrade Jack Barnes referred to in the Memorandum on Membership Policy adopted by the PC Nov. 13, 1970, where he said the policy "breeds . . . misinterpretations . . . internally." For example, many comrades believed and argued that the reason for our policy was a conscious adaptation to the antihomosexual prejudices of workers. In reality, any such adaptation was *unconscious*, or, looked at another way, the result of the penetration of prejudice (the source of which was *not* workers, however strongly workers are prejudiced) into the party itself. The official, stated reason for the policy by the comrades with the central responsibility for administering the party, who developed the policy, was strictly along the lines of security—that homosexuals could be arrested or blackmailed and this allegedly could open the party itself to victimization.

But the understanding of many, many comrades was that we had to have such a policy because "workers hate queers." Another common reason, raised more by comrades who had been organizers or held other positions of major administrative responsibility, concerned the idea that homosexuals, if admitted, would seek to transmute the party from a combat organization into a refuge of homosexual happiness. This notion can be found in the Memorandum on Membership Policy by Comrade Barnes, although there it is carefully qualified—homosexuals "usually" go through crises, "some" homosexual comrades tried to change the party, and the problem is "not limited to homosexual comrades"—and, more importantly, there it is used to argue that the policy is *not* necessary, rather than the opposite.

The echoes of false ideas expressed in discussions of the policy three years ago still reverberate in the April 29, 1973, Memorandum on the Gay Liberation Movement.

### Advising the YSA

In the spring of 1970, Comrades Nelson Blackstock and Helen Meyers went on national organizational/speaking tours for the YSA. They found considerable discontent with the policy in more than a few locals. Objection was strongest in locals that had actually experienced the loss of a homosexual member because of the policy, but there was also opposition from comrades who had only heard of the policy in branch plenum reports. This position made it obvious that the YSA would have to take up the question of barring homosexuals from mem-



ship, just as the party had taken it up. Actually, one of the factors that led to the party's taking up the issue was the educational intervention of a liberation organization at the 1969 YSA convention and in the preconvention discussion of the Twin Cities local, which hosted the convention.)

Comrade political collaboration of the YSA and SWP involves extensive consultation between the leaderships of the two organizations at all levels. In the early summer of 1970, Comrade Susan LaMont (who was then functioning as National Chairwoman of the YSA, although Comrade Seigle still formally held the post of National Chairwoman) requested advice from the party on how to handle the membership policy question. A series of meetings was initiated, involving Comrades Barnes, Britton, LaMont, and me. (I was involved because I was to draft and present the organizational report to the YSA NC following the first Socialist Activists and Educational Conference.)

#### 1970 YSA Plenum: A Trial Balloon

The edited transcript of the organizational report I presented to the YSA plenum was printed in the Sept. 2, 1970, *Young Socialist Organizer*. Comrade Barnes refers to it in the Nov. 13, 1970, Memorandum on Membership Policy, and the relevant section appears after this article as an appendix.

Leaving aside the irony (or hypocrisy, if you will) of the fact that a homosexual presented the arguments for excluding homosexuals from membership, there was a very important dishonesty involved in this report.

That is, the report was prepared with the idea that the party being motivated would very probably be eliminated in the near future. Built into the motivation—for this very reason—was an "escape hatch" for changing the policy, part of the reason for defending its continuation was to make a sounding of the YSA NC's attitude in order to see how urgently we needed to use that "escape hatch." The "escape hatch," as it turned out, was never used. It had been the argument that the necessity for the policy depended on the existence of antihomosexual laws and customs of opinion making it possible to enforce those laws—such that a shift in the climate or changes in the laws would mean we should get rid of the policy. The "escape hatch" with the escape by this route was that it depended on affirming the past correctness of the policy.

A careful reading of the Memorandum on Membership Policy will reveal that, in reporting for the administrative committee, Comrades Barnes neither clearly affirmed the party's past correctness, nor clearly said that it had always been wrong.

The reason for this ambiguity—for refraining from a straightforward self-criticism and rejection of the policy as the expression of bourgeois prejudice into the party (which is what it was)—must have lain in divisions within the party. As one who is not privy to the content of PC discussions, I say this on belief, rather than on information. I also believe a division in the PC was responsible for advising the YSA to reaffirm the policy, rather than argue for its rejection. That is, the reason put forward at the time was that there was no time for the PC to discuss the policy prior to the YSA plenum. This meant that the party was in a position of the general consideration—which is correct—that it is best for the YSA, which looks to the revolution-

ary party for political leadership, to wait for the SWP's lead in questions affecting both organizations, the YSA should not go ahead and get rid of the policy. It was a thorny matter because the issue also could not be ignored until the party acted, given the ferment in the YSA over the policy. It seems that it would have warranted extraordinary effort to have the matter resolved by the PC before the YSA plenum, had this not been impossible because of opposition in the PC to changing the policy.

This would all be nothing more than water under the bridge except for the fact that *the failure to firmly reject the policy and declare that it had always been wrong has left the door open to continued errors*. Some of them are still embodied in the April 29, 1973, memorandum. Briefly, the mistake involved leads, on one hand, to a willingness to kowtow before prejudice, and, on the other, to a readiness to affront the dignity of homosexuals. In 1970 it was judged more important to cajole party leaders with the wrong position than to stop a practice that shut the party's doors to talented and dedicated potential cadres.

#### Good-bye Without Good Riddance

As mentioned above, the Nov. 13, 1970, Memorandum on Membership Policy takes an agnostic stand on the past rightness or wrongness of the policy. The concluding sections of the report on enforceability and misinterpretation strongly *imply* that the policy was always wrong. Comrade Barnes writes, for example, that the policy "is not really viable in that it creates more problems than it solves."

But Comrade Barnes also says, "Of course, we also know that with some newer members this [discomfort with the policy] is for the wrong reasons. It takes a little while for members, especially new members, to actually come to an understanding of what a revolutionary party is and what it cannot be." The "wrong reasons" are not spelled out, but one possible inference is that those who understand what the party is know that the policy was okay in the past. I don't believe the policy was ever okay. It is true, of course, that under conditions of severe repression—in a witchhunt, under a dictatorship, or if the party is illegal—things have to be tightened up, and some people who the party can use in more favorable circumstances will not match up to the task under such conditions. But I don't believe this is ever a question of a comrade's race, nationality, sex, sexual orientation, hair or eye color, etc. What we criticize the Communist Party for in connection with its suspension of its Japanese-American members in the 1940s is not only that it was done in deference to a spirit of jingoistic racism. We don't, I think, add qualifiers like, "Of course, in some circumstances a revolutionary party might have to ban members of racial minorities in order to protect its security." I don't believe underground organizations owing loyalty to the Fourth International in Hitler's Germany banned Jews from membership after the Nazi race laws were passed. Comrade Barnes implies that the "newer comrades" who were uncomfortable for the "wrong reasons" held some kind of moral objection to the policy. From the point of view of a "revolutionary morality" that defines what is acceptable in terms of what advances or stands in the way of the class struggle, no justification for the banning of homosexuals from party membership can



be found. The fact that the country was just barely coming out of McCarthyism when we began evolving toward the policy makes it *understandable*. It does not mean it was *correct*.

Adding further to the confusion is the earlier section falling between the second and third set of triple asterisks, on page 11, in *DB*, Vol. 31, No. 3. Here Comrade Barnes discusses court challenges to sodomy statutes, stands taken by bourgeois candidates, and other factors that *hint* at the originally projected escape route from the policy—that *suggest* a change in the climate of opinion may be behind the change. In fact, it was on this section that attention focused during the discussion of the issue at the December 1970 YSA convention. Even the NEC's reporter misplaced his emphasis on this section, rather than on the telling arguments in the concluding sections on enforceability and misinterpretation.

Nearly three years later there are comrades who still believe that the policy was once right, believing also then by implication that in some circumstances it could properly be reinstated. A clean end to the whole chapter of the membership policy is still needed.

#### *The Two Probes: February, 1971—May 25, 1971, and May 25, 1971—August, 1971*

Our probing of the gay liberation movement in 1971 did not begin with the passage of the Political Committee's May 25, 1971, motion (*DB*, Vol. 31, No. 3). Actually, that motion represented the beginning of a braking process that aimed at slowing down work begun four months earlier—a braking process that has culminated, two-and-a-half years later, in the Memorandum on the Gay Liberation Movement. Some leading comrades felt that our probing of the gay movement was "going too far." At one informal meeting, Comrade Barnes cautioned comrades getting involved in gay liberation against "going apeshit." The feedback that started hitting the center as reports were carried back from the mid-March NC plenum and as *The Militant* began reflecting our growing involvement in gay liberation signaled that at least a layer of comrades felt the party had gone "apeshit"—or was "going overboard on this gay thing." It was only under the impact of this feedback that the motion supposedly initiating the probe was passed by the PC. The effect of the motion—at least in New York—was to constrict the range of activity in which a number of comrades had already been involved since February.

#### *The April 24 Gay Task Force*

One of the first steps the party took toward changing its previous position of ignoring the gay liberation movement was the assigning of homosexual comrades (with our consent) to a gay workshop at the February, 1971, National Student Antiwar Conference sponsored by the Student Mobilization Committee in Washington, D. C. Comrade Larry Seigle headed up the party's fractional intervention into that student antiwar conference, and in consonance with decisions taken in the fraction, the party and YSA put their support behind a gay workshop proposal that the SMC initiate a Gay Task Force to build participation in gay contingents in the April 24, 1971, antiwar demonstrations in D. C. and San Francisco. The proposal was drawn up by Comrade John Lauritsen, then a party sympathizer and member of the Red Butterfly.

Comrade David Thorstad and I began to attend some meetings of groups such as the Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee and the Gay Activists Alliance. Originally, this was done in consultation with Comrades Barnes and Barry Sheppard. As more comrades became involved, direction of our activity moved to the New York local organizer, Comrade Lew Jones, and the New York branch organizers, Susan LaMont, Wendy Reissner, and Peter Seidman.

One main axis of our activity in these organizations was the building of support for the April 24 Gay Task Force and gay contingent. When those demonstrations took place two months later, the Washington gay contingent drew about 1,500. *The Militant* reported that the San Francisco gay contingent reached 2,000 by the end of the march, noting that this made it "the largest demonstration of gays ever held in the West" up to that time and calling it "among the most vocal and spirited" contingents in the action.

(In the 1971 preconvention discussion period Comrade Hedda Garza charged that participants in the D. C. gay contingent had fondled each other and made a disgusting spectacle of themselves. She also made some charges about the party being turned into a "conversion school for lesbians" and a "haven or hospital" for "Gay people and man-haters." Somehow Comrade Garza's charges regarding the party—which were as groundless as her charges regarding the gay antiwar contingent—seem to have influenced Point 5 of the April 29, 1973, Memorandum on the Gay Liberation Movement.)

#### *Christopher Street*

But the Gay Task Force was not the only project we worked on during the first probe. Comrades were assigned to work in the Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee in New York well before the Political Committee adopted its motion of May 25, 1971. Of course, they continued their work after the motion was adopted. There was a major party intervention, mainly geared to sales of our press, at the 1971 gay pride action in New York. The July 2, 1971, *Militant* carried a major article, "Homosexuality: Fact Versus Myth," directed toward the gay pride demonstrators. Attention was called to this article by a frontpage headline.

#### *The Militant*

The article in *The Militant* sold at the Christopher Street action was part two of what was originally projected—in a meeting of the administrative committee, Comrade Mary-Alice Waters, Comrade Thorstad, and me—as a series of three feature articles. However, it was pointed out—and emphasized by Comrade Waters—that this series would be a trial balloon, would not be projected in print as a series, would be spaced apart, and might not be completed. It was not completed, as it turned out. Part three, dealing with the Judeo-Christian tradition and homosexual oppression, was never run—even though it had been approved by the administrative committee and edited by Comrade Sheppard. However, it was not clearly stated that the decision not to run it had been reached until postponements had been dragged out for more than six months. The first article in the series appeared in the April 16, 1971, *Militant*. Entitled, "On the Nature of Gay Oppression," it represents the kind of article that would not be submitted to *The Militant* if the Memorandum on Gay



Liberation stands as party policy. But it was an extremely useful article, and it has been widely reproduced, both nationally and internationally. It was used as the basis for an article this year by our cothinkers in New Zealand for sales at the gay pride actions there.

In addition to these articles, *The Militant* carried reviews and news articles on gay liberation that were prominently featured and illustrated with photographs. (And, as a matter of interest for those who are afraid gays will give the party a freaky appearance, the April 16 issue of *The Militant*, sold the week before April 24, that carried the frontpage headline, "ALL OUT APRIL 24!" needed a picture of a mass demonstration for the cover—and the one used was a photo of the March 14 gay action in Albany, N.Y. Since the photo was not identified as such, however, there was no way to tell what it was.)

#### *The Austin Conference, Forums, and the Albany Action*

Before the May 25, 1971, motion was adopted by the PC, I was assigned to attend and report on a national gay conference in Austin, Texas, in March, 1971. I worked with comrades from the Austin branch in intervening at that conference to seek support for the April 24 antiwar march. At the YSA's national movement center in the D.C. branch headquarters after the April 24 demonstration, one of the programs features was a panel discussion on gay liberation involving Comrades Thorstad and Terry Hillman, John Lauritsen of Red Butterfly, Franklin Kameny of Washington, D.C., Mattachine, and Tina Mandel of Daughters of Bilitis. (Kameny and Mandel were the gay speakers at the antiwar action.)

At a regional YSA educational conference at New York University in May 1971, Comrades Steve Beren, Kipp Dawson, David Thorstad, and I spoke on "Why Marxists Support Gay Liberation." I believe each of us said things then that would now be considered "going beyond" what is representative of the party's position. The same, I think, was true of the comrades' presentations at the April 24 panel. I know for certain that when Comrade Hillman and I traveled to Philadelphia to take part in a forum on the same topic after the May 25 motion was adopted, we were careful to censor things we had said in the earlier programs out of our talks. Also after the motion, a tentative proposal to make an article for the *International Socialist Review* out of the NYU panel was jund.

Through our participation in gay organizations and our news coverage in *The Militant*, we made a real effort to build a statewide demonstration against antigay laws in Albany, N.Y., on March 14, 1971. The action was organized around the demand for extending civil rights protection to homosexuals in the areas of employment, housing, and public accommodations, and the demand to repeal sodomy, solicitation, loitering, and cross-dressing laws. Approximately 1,200 people took part in the action. Among the speakers was Kate Millet. The demonstration coincided with the SWP NC plenum.

#### *The March 1971 Plenum*

The braking process represented by the May 25, 1971, PC motion, the constriction of our gay liberation work, the tapering off of *Militant* coverage, the decline in forums on the subject—all of this seems to have come as a reaction against what had been done up to that time. And

the reaction—the opposition—seems to have crystallized around the March 1971 SWP NC plenum.

There is considerable documentary evidence of the wholehearted, enthusiastically positive attitude toward the gay liberation movement that existed around the time of the plenum. The attitude from February up through the plenum was genuinely one of welcoming and embracing this new movement. *Internal Information Bulletin* No. 2 in 1971 (April, 1971) contains the Youth Report to SWP National Committee Plenum, March 15, 1971, by Frank Boehm.

A rather lengthy section of Comrade Boehm's report—as printed—deals with gay liberation. It can be found on page 29 of the bulletin, beginning with: "Hundreds of gay organizations have sprung up on the campuses all across the country. This movement is bringing the rage of millions of homosexuals who are—and have been for thousands of years—brutalized and murdered out of the closets and into the streets." The report before editing spent even more time on gay liberation. The paragraph that is printed referring to "various actions being planned in local or regional areas against political oppression of homosexuals, such as yesterday's action in Albany. . . ." was delivered as an enthusiastic report on the previous day's demonstration.

One NC member, who may have been part of the feedback the national office afterward reacted to, explained to me how Boehm's report had startled him and how it had gotten his back up, being confronted with something that seemed to have been smuggled in via the youth report—viz., the projection of gay liberation as an important area of activity for the Trotskyist movement. Actually, of course, this was no trick by the party leadership but simply a result of the YSA chairman's enthusiasm.

But while Comrade Boehm may have, in Comrade Barnes' words, gone a little "apeshit," Comrade Barnes himself was not unenthusiastic. His report on the 1971 draft resolution contained numerous references to gay liberation, including a reference to the fact that the number of gay workers is in the millions, not merely the thousands. A comparison of the report as it appeared in the *Discussion Bulletin*, Vol. 29, No. 1, with the way it appeared in the *International Socialist Review* and in the pamphlet, *A Revolutionary Strategy for the '70s: Documents of the Socialist Workers Party* reveals that some of Comrade Barnes's more exuberant phrases also bit the editorial-pencil dust in moving from internal to external publication. But even as his report appeared in the *ISR* and the pamphlet, its treatment of gay liberation contrasts starkly with the April 29, 1973, memorandum. Also contrasting with the memorandum is Comrade Gus Horowitz's introduction to *Towards an American Socialist Revolution*, written in the same general time period.

After the plenum there came a discernible pulling back from what was suddenly seen as having been an overboard involvement in the gay movement. The May 25, 1971, PC motion was part of this pullback. The motion suggested to those of us involved in the probe for the first time that there was some question about the party's ultimate intervention into the gay liberation movement. Given the fact that activity up to that point had provoked a reaction from leaders of the party in the center and around the country, such a pullback was not at all unjustified. But the central party leadership then had the



responsibility to lead the party forward on this issue, and it has defaulted in that responsibility. Both the literary discussion and the April 29, 1973, memorandum testify to that. Both are at odds with the general understanding at the time of the 1971 convention that the ending of the probe would be coupled with an effort to "bring the party along."

### *The Gay Workshops at the 1971 Convention*

In retrospect it appears that a decisive turn away from the initial enthusiasm about gay liberation occurred in the period between the plenum and the convention in 1971. For whatever reasons, the gay liberation movement seems to have been reassessed as an episodic and not-too-important phenomenon. The main attention shifted from the gay movement itself to its impact on the internal life of the party. I say this *appears* to be the case. I cannot read minds and I have no knowledge of what discussions occurred in the administrative committee or Political Committee bearing on this shift. But if one looks at the steps that have been taken since the 1971 convention with the understanding that the central leadership's main concern was to curb what they saw as negative effects on the party's internal life and that this concern was wedded to a misreading of the gay movement as a mainly counter-cultural phenomenon, then all of the moves make sense.

The ostensible purpose of the two workshops on gay liberation held at the 1971 convention was to draw together the information from the probe. A quick glance at the summary of the workshop discussions published in *Internal Information Bulletin* No. 3 in 1971 will reveal that they were largely unsuccessful as sources of much substantive information. But they were successful in another respect. They achieved the support of the majority of participants for the NC's proposal to end the probe and enter a literary discussion on the party's orientation. Now, the understanding was, "the leadership will lead"—"We have to bring the party along."

### *The Literary Discussion*

The essential problem in the literary discussion—reflective of the central party leadership's apparent aim to simultaneously justify *both its earlier estimate of gay liberation and its retreat from that position*—can best be seen by reviewing Comrade Sheppard's article, "Concerning the Discussion" (*DB*, Vol. 30, No. 8), which served as the basis for the April 29, 1973, Memorandum on Gay Liberation.

Comrade Sheppard's article: (1) noted and answered some countercultural and utopian notions raised in the discussion, at the same time confusing this trend with the separate issue of the need for the party to make a clearcut rejection of antihomosexual "theories" used to justify gay oppression; (2) replied to criticism of the leadership's estimation of gay liberation implied in the contributions of Comrades Nat Weinstein and Roland Sheppard (Ironically, Comrade Barry Sheppard disputed here arguments very close to those now put forward in the memorandum.); (3) alleged that his view of gay oppression and the struggle to end it was *essentially* no different from that of Comrades Thorstad and Michael Maggi (who stressed the revolutionary, anticapitalist dynamic of gay liberation); and (4) used the lack of a national focus in

the gay movement as the major reason for not undertaking an active, partywide intervention.

My opinion at the time was that Comrade Sheppard's article set the stage for the adoption of an orientation aggressively championing gay liberation. In retrospect, looked at in light of the memorandum and in the context of the whole braking process, it is clear that his arguments pointed in a different direction.

### *The Memorandum*

In his literary discussion article, Comrade Barry Sheppard chided Comrades Weinstein and Roland Sheppard for appearing to favor the relegation of the party's stand in behalf of gay rights to "a file marked 'positions adopted but better forgotten.'" Now the memorandum asks the whole party to approve relegating our position to such a file.

Last year Comrade Sheppard wrote: "We must not confuse the question of what may be necessary for the taking of power by the workers, and the program of the vanguard party that intends to lead not only the taking of power, but the mobilization of the working class and its allies in the historic task of rebuilding society from top to bottom, eliminating every vestige of discrimination and oppression spawned by class society. And, while power will be taken by the working class around the most burning issues of the class struggle, which are *part* of our full program, power is much more likely to be taken by the working class to the extent that it succeeds in mobilizing the widest layers of the oppressed, convincing them by its deeds that the taking of power by the working class will in fact end all forms of oppression." (Original emphasis.)

This year the memorandum states: "The major issues we should be concentrating on are the big questions of the class struggle, and this must be reflected in the totality of the party's projection of its program. It would be a mistake to place equal emphasis upon the struggle of women or Blacks, and that of gay people, for example." (Never has the party ever come close to placing "equal emphasis" on the struggles of Blacks and women with that of gays. But in 1971—before the May 25 PC motion—it did place *some* emphasis on this struggle.)

Last year Comrade Sheppard wrote: "The gay liberation movement does not have the potential mass of either the women's movement or the movements of the major oppressed nationalities, nor the social weight of these movements, which results both from their mass and the scope of the questions they raise. The gay liberation movement clearly does not raise such a central question of world politics as the antiwar movement does. In our long-term strategic priorities, then, it is certainly more peripheral to the central issues of the class struggle than either the women's movement or the movements of the oppressed nationalities, or the struggle against imperialist wars. *But this estimate of relative proportions and priorities does not negate the significance of the movement for us.*" (Emphasis added.)

This year the memorandum states: "In our long-term strategic priorities, the gay liberation movement is much more peripheral to the central issues of the class struggle than either the women's movement or the movements of the oppressed nationalities. Neither does it raise such a central issue of world politics as the struggle against impe-



rialist wars." the "but" clause I emphasized from last August has disappeared this spring. A side-by-side comparison of the article and the memorandum will show a distinct shift away from the estimate made even a year ago.

Moreover, even last year's approach was put forward in the context of a two-year pullback from any but the most peripheral involvement in the gay movement. The gay memorandum proposes a ratification of this retreat and abstention—which was originally proposed as a *temporary* stepping back while we held the literary discussion. The discussion that was supposed to "bring the party along" has instead been used to hold the party back vis-a-vis gay liberation. Now the memorandum proposes freezing that stance as our *permanent* orientation to the gay movement.

I believe there is a chilling note of intimidation in the memorandum as well. Point number 5 of the memorandum, coming in the context of a whole document that deemphasizes and plays down the gay movement as mainly a countercultural thing providing social services on campus—with "notable exceptions"—can be inferred as a warning or a threat to gay comrades. Homosexuals pose no danger—just because they are homosexuals—of making the party appear "exotic," and a discussion of freaky appearance and behavior would have better been placed elsewhere than in a document on gay liberation. Moreover, in this use of the word "exotic" and in references to all-women's parties that smack of things written by Comrade Hedda Garza in 1971, there is another unheal-

thy aspect. It was Comrade Weinstein, in his concern for the workers who are too tired to think about sex, who used the word "exotic" in the literary discussion. The memorandum's use of this word and its deemphasis of the movement carry in them faint echoes of the old argument used to justify the membership policy: "Workers hate queers."

Coming at a time when the party is preparing a turn toward mass propaganda and probing opportunities within the labor movement, these echoes suggest that this wrong and backward idea about workers' prejudices still has not been stamped out.

The correct attitude on the prejudices of workers is set forth in the document that ought to be chosen by the party to stand in place of the memorandum, "For an Intervention Into the Gay Liberation Struggle" by David Thorstad and Kendall Green. Thorstad and Green state: "The American working class, which will take upon its shoulders the task of transforming and directing the whole social order, can and will ally with all the progressive enemies of capitalism, put aside its prejudices to forge such alliances, and ultimately overcome those prejudices as it begins the evolution toward communist humanity."

An orientation to generally assigning comrades to work in the gay liberation movement, and placing this work under national party direction does not exaggerate the importance of this movement, nor will it turn away workers from the SWP. Our work in the winter and spring of 1971 should be the guide to our orientation now.

July 18, 1973



Recently, with the rise of the radicalization and in particular influenced by the women's liberation movement, many homosexuals have begun to organize into groups to fight against the persecution and discrimination they suffer in this society. It is only with the rise of the gay liberation movement that many comrades have become aware of a policy of some ten years standing proscribing homosexuals from membership in the YSA. Because this policy was adopted by a decision in the National Executive Committee for security purposes after some concrete experiences which pointed up the need for such a policy, and, as such, never came up for any formal discussion in the organization outside of the NEC—and because many comrades only learned of the policy recently, and because of the increased frequency with which it has become a question—there is an understandable confusion among many comrades about the policy. The NEC has decided that because it has come up and we can expect it to come up some more, we have a responsibility to discuss and explain the policy to the plenum.

I am going to spend a little time to, first of all, clarify what our position and our policy is, and to explain the origin and motivate the reasons for the policy. If we are going to discuss the question here, and if we are going to be confronted with people attacking our organization and asking for a justification of the policy in the local areas, as we already are, it is crucial to place the discussion on the proper political axis.

In order to do that, it is necessary to abstract the discussion from any prejudices which may exist within the organization, or within the working class or any other sector of society. We know that sexual prejudice is perhaps the most deep-seated kind of prejudice internalized in members of this class society, as evidenced by the sweeping psychological repercussions of the women's liberation movement. But we do not adopt or discuss political policy on the basis of backward prejudice. As Marxists and revolutionaries, we support the personal freedom and privacy of every individual. From our standpoint, the efforts of the state to regulate and punish personal sexual behavior is absurd and reactionary. We are for the widest possible enlargement of human freedom, including the freedom of the individual to do whatever he or she chooses that does not injure or interfere with anyone else's freedom.

Thus, we unconditionally oppose the oppression of homosexuals and support their fight to end that oppression. This is a separate question from the membership question. Our membership policy is a security policy.

The laws against homosexual behavior combined with the social climate which makes it possible for the ruling class to enforce those laws mean that allowing homosexuals to hold membership in our organization would subject us to victimization. It must be understood that were there no laws against it, or were the social climate such that enforcement were impossible, as say, the enforcement of the laws against fornication, then the policy would be changed. However, while these hypothetical conditions may obtain at some point in the future—at which time we would have to review the policy—they do not obtain now. This is the reason for the policy and while the reason remains, so does the policy.

The policy was not adopted on the basis of speculation. It was adopted simultaneously by the Socialist Workers Party and the YSA around ten years ago as a result of concrete experience. Up until then, our movement had never had any policy on the question. It was, as I said earlier, initiated by the National Offices of both the YSA and SWP.

While the policy is, as comrades can see, precisely the same kind of policy as the drug policy from the organization's point of view, it is, of course, quite different from the individual's point of view. A person can quit using drugs, but a person cannot give up one's sexuality. But while there is a cruel aspect to this from the individual's point of view and an unfortunate one for the movement, too, we must also keep in mind what it means to be allied with the combat party. In one sense, the policy also protects the individual as well as the movement. Someone who might never be troubled outside of the movement would be far more subject to persecution, blackmail, arrest, etc., as a member. The ruling class measures us against a different set of criteria than they use for the labor bureaucracy, or the social democracy, for example. Things they will be inclined to let go by with the others, in our case they will use to nail us. We cannot operate as we would—or will—in a workers state, existing, as we do today, under combat conditions as the revolutionary opposition to the ruling class.



(Vol. 31, No. 30)

## WHAT THE DISCUSSION ON THE GAY STRUGGLE HAS REVEALED

by Jon Hillson, Joe Johnson and Bill Perdue, Denver Branch

The current wave of struggle for the democratic rights of gays began a little over three years ago. For two of those years we have been trying to decide what to do about it. That discussion has revealed a sharp and widening division in the ranks and the leadership of the party.

At present, there are four views on the question. The two major views are those presented in the memorandum and the counterposed Green-Thorstad resolution "For an Intervention Into the Gay Liberation Movement." In addition, some comrades still cling to the conservative and economist views presented by Weinstein and an even smaller number to the utopian and counterculturalist views of Comrade Gebert.

In our view, this division is not an indication of a crisis nor a signal for the development of a factional situation. Rather, it should be viewed as an opportunity for the party to clear up a major problem of ambiguity and lack of consistency.

Nevertheless, it is a serious matter. Leadership and rank-and-file comrades alike are divided, and the differences are sharp.

As supporters of the Green-Thorstad amendment to the PC draft resolution, and the general line of the political resolution, we think that a further sharpening of the issues is necessary. The party must have a clear idea of what the memorandum calls for. There should be no illusions that the differences between the memorandum and the Green-Thorstad counterresolution are minor or semantic. Further, no one should be under the illusion that, if it is passed, the party will go any further than what is contained in the memorandum. Comrades who say otherwise do *not* understand the memorandum.

### *Is a Memo Enough?*

The memorandum was hesitantly passed at the recent plenum of the National Committee. It is the product of a discussion that began in the party shortly after the change in membership policy in late 1970. Our opinion is that it is a departure from the general line of the political resolution in 1971 and the draft political resolution of the PC now before us. In addition, we think it is internally inconsistent and ambiguous, and that it prevents a reasonable and balanced partywide orientation to the gay struggle.

This is apparent from an analysis of the character, history and content of the memorandum itself.

First of all, it is merely a memo, a reminder. Following two years of discussion, during which its authors apparently underwent a significant and unexplained change of mind, the party is now presented with — a memo.

### *The Memorandum and our Analysis of the Radicalization*

For the last two conventions, our political resolutions have analyzed the radicalization and mapped out a response to it. That analysis has enabled us to enter the movements aroused by the radicalization, intervene, recruit, gain valuable experience in the use of the program and proletarian norms of struggle and raise our program before wider layers than ever before.

Central to that approach has been the perspective of intervention. At the last convention the party decisively rejected the FAPO line of abstentionism and sectarianism. The 1971 political resolution, "Perspectives and Lessons of the New Radicalization," stated:

"The existence and growth of this radicalization prior to the radicalization of major sections of the working class is of vital importance to the Marxist tendency. Our capacity to recruit and educate a Marxist cadre that is active and influential in the movements as they arise, that fights for leadership against the claims of all our opponents, is decisive in building a mass Leninist workers party capable of leading the coming struggle for power to a victorious conclusion.

"In all stages of building the mass revolutionary socialist party its cadres must be alert to, recognize and embrace the new forms of struggle and the demands of oppressed groupings that appear as the radicalization develops. The Leninist party champions the fighting movements of all oppressed social layers and advances and develops their key democratic and transitional demands as part of its own. The revolutionary vanguard consciously uses its participation in these movements to draw the lessons necessary to bring revolutionary socialist consciousness to as broad a layer of militants as possible.

"In view of the decisiveness of the construction of the revolutionary party, our most important objective in involving ourselves deeply in these mass movements and absorbing their lessons is to recruit the best militants and help them to assimilate Trotskyism; and gain the political experience necessary to become integrated in the expanding Trotskyist cadre."

What we have done is to carry out, in a new situation, the line and method of Leninist party building in battle after battle—except one, the struggle for democratic rights of gays.

### *Why?*

The 1971 political resolution noted the rise of several new components in the radicalization, including the GL prisoners and gay movements. In spite of the fact that prison guards and MPs had some effect in limiting our ability to orient to the barracks and prisons, we covered them in our press, compiled and published books and



pamphlets and held occasional support actions, all of which were correct and important.

However, our orientation to the gay liberation struggle was different. Press coverage was limited, no publications were authorized and few support actions carried out. This was in spite of the fact that there were no guards to limit our access, except internal ones.

Apparently hesitant and unsure as to how to proceed, the PC launched a probe prior to the 1971 convention. At that convention a panel was held to hear reports on the probe. Instead it spent the bulk of its time discussing the next motion of the PC which was to "freeze" gay work pending a discussion.

After nine months delay, in May 1972, that discussion began and was concluded in August of that year. Finally, in April of this year, the PC presented the memorandum to the plenum.

In the 23 months between the launching of the probe and the plenum, without formal guidance, the branches did some minimal work. Most adopted a wait-and-see attitude, and several held an occasional forum, although even that was difficult in some branches.

#### *What Is the Content of the Memorandum?*

Some of the formulations and one whole section of the memorandum are adequate. The long-range estimate of the weight of the gay struggle in the class struggle, the inserted section rejecting antigay prejudice and the bulk of the third section are adequate.

However, we must look at the document as a whole and determine the general thrust of its orientation, its general line. That is what's up for vote. That can best be done by noting the limits it places on possible orientation to the gay liberation movement.

1. No mention was made in the PC's original draft to the plenum of a rejection of antigay prejudice. This omission is consistent with the general line of the memorandum.

2. Even following editing, the memorandum offers no serious analysis of the role of antigay prejudice. That too is consistent with the general line of the memorandum.

3. The memorandum makes no reference to the need or even the desirability of recruiting the best elements of the gay struggle.

This omission is also consistent with the general line of the draft, which would allow little more than occasional press releases or occasional participation in actions we cannot organize. Without opportunities for common work, why worry about recruitment? This is a marked departure from our attitude towards every other layer of the radicalization.

4. The memorandum makes a totally false amalgam between questions of personal taste—the "value" of gay sex—and a prime question of politics and science for the gay movement—the "nature" of gay sexuality.

It is correct to take a totally hands off attitude on the question of the "value" of gay sex.

But it is another thing entirely to amalgamate that with a question of science and politics, and on that specious basis, attempt to ignore it. The answer to the question of the nature of gay sexuality is that it is a naturally occurring form of human sexuality.

5. The memorandum, sternly and without any attempt at justification, says that any attempt to make use of

a scientific definition of the nature of gay sexuality by the party would "... dilute its nature as a political organization ... narrow its appeal, and cripple its ability to mobilize the masses. ..."

That is patently absurd. The women's movement and the gay movement take up combined questions of science and politics to combat the lies and prejudices upon which the ruling class bases its discrimination and oppressive laws.

The use of science by the party on the woman question is now welcome. It is a valuable tool. To be consistent and correct, the same method must be used in defense of the rights of gays by the revolutionary party. To state as the memorandum very clearly does, that the party will not use this valuable tool in a political struggle, as a political weapon, will indeed "... dilute its nature as a political organization ... narrow its appeal and cripple its ability to mobilize the masses. ..."

6. To bolster and justify the unnecessarily limited and narrow approach outlined in the memorandum, it states that it would be impossible to try to make a distinction between scientific fact and bourgeois "fantasy" on the question of the nature of gay sexuality.

We have already pointed out that the party must make precisely this distinction or abstain from the struggle for gay rights. We cannot rely on a moral reason, or no reason at all, as the basis for our support to this movement—that would be stepping out of the political bounds and traditions of the SWP.

Further, it is unbelievable that the SWP cannot tell fact from bourgeois fantasy. We are sure that the party based on the ideas of the authors of *The Communist Manifesto*, *What is to Be Done* and the Transitional Program can set the record straight. It is utterly ridiculous to state that the party that analyzed the radicalization, that added and updated a major theoretical contribution to our understanding of the national question, the party that aspires to leadership of the international revolutionary movement, cannot, with little effort, see through the slime and offal of bourgeois prejudice!

7. The memorandum contains inconclusive information and analyses of the conjunctural state of the gay struggle. It elaborately refuses to take note of the central fact of that conjuncture. That is, that the gay movement is not a casualty of the lull, that it has not won any major concessions or large victories, that it is still around, alive and kicking, and that it involves both significant forces and opportunities for us to intervene.

That central fact about the current stage of the gay movement is entirely absent from the memorandum! Reading it, one would be led to believe that it is a casualty of the lull. The memorandum has an entirely inadequate appreciation of the current stage of the gay movement.

8. The fifth section of the memorandum dealing with organizational questions and problems, some of which came up in the course of the discussion, makes points that are by-and-large correct.

However, its placement in the memorandum is very incorrect. It is objectionable, out of place and context and potentially misleading.

The authors of the memorandum hotly deny that they had any intention of directing the fifth section only to gay comrades or that it was a warning about the dangers of recruiting gays. We believe them. We also believe that



from the gay struggle. Even the insertion, after strong protest from the comrades at the plenum, of a rejection of antigay prejudice is inconsistent with the general line of the memorandum.

On balance, the memorandum would make almost impossible an intervention in, contact with, or recruitment from, the gay struggle. That has been the case since the inception of the gay movement.

The memorandum should be rejected and replaced with Green and Thorstad's "For an Intervention Into the Gay Liberation Movement." Then we can intervene, present our program to a wider layer, and gain valuable recruits to the party.

July 23, 1973



STATEMENT ON GAY LIBERATION DISCUSSION  
by Harry Ring, Los Angeles Branch

(Vol. 31, No. 31)

The following is a statement which I made in the Los Angeles branch gay liberation discussion July 22. In addition, I stated that I favored separating the convention discussion on the question from the debate on the political resolution and counterresolution.

I feel this is necessary in order to have an adequate discussion of the gay liberation issue without interfering or cutting across the debate on the political resolution. I also stated that I favored separating out of the National Committee gay liberation memorandum the section on dress code and personal conduct. I think its inclusion in the memorandum injects an extraneous point into the debate around the question of gay liberation. Separated comrades can more easily vote on this point without regard to their views on the memorandum and the counterresolution.

\* \* \*

I have not yet thought through to a definitive conclusion on our attitude toward the National Committee gay liberation memorandum and the counterresolution offered by Comrades Thorstad and Green.

I do, however, have a reasonably well thought out conception of what I believe our approach to the gay liberation movement should be.

I think we must make clear to our entire membership, and to the people generally, that we regard the emergence of the contemporary gay liberation movement as a highly progressive one and that we stand in full solidarity with it. We should explain why the demand for full human and civil rights for gay people is totally justified and why we see the struggle for those rights as a significant contribution to the fight against the capitalist system and the manifold forms of exploitation and oppression which it spawns.

We should combat all those who oppose or fail to support the gay liberation movement with the prejudiced, reactionary argument that gayness is an illness or aberration and that gays somehow are inferior to other human beings.

We must oppose such views in much the same way that we oppose the myths of the "inferiority" of women or racial minorities. We should, in particular, condemn the reactionary opposition to gay liberation by the Stalinists and others in the radical movement.

We should reject the view that the gay liberation struggle is "peripheral" to the central issues of the class struggle.

I do not believe that the gay liberation struggle has the same social weight and potential in relation to the coming American revolution as that of the national minorities, of women, or even of the youth movement. But to assess the role of a particular movement or social strata as lesser than others is quite different from characterizing it as peripheral. I think it is apparent that the gay liberation movement is already a significant component of the radicalization and I am convinced its potential will further increase.

I think it is true that at the present time the opportunity for intervention into the gay liberation movement is on a local basis. But this does not preclude a national perspective in relation to such activity or national guidance and direction. And we have a national obligation in terms of what our press, publications and national spokespeople have to say on the question.

I believe we should seek to intervene in the gay liberation movement, and do so with our political conceptions of how the movement can be built and how its aims can be best advanced.

We should do this within the framework of our political priorities. But those priorities should not be permitted to become a rationalization for those who oppose or have serious reservations about intervening in the gay movement.

I believe that concern for the party's political image is as valid as the concern that allocation of forces for such work be determined on the basis of our political priorities.

We do not want to create the image that we are a gay people's party any more than we want to create the image that we are a women's party, a Black or Chicano party, or even exclusively proletarian. We are a working-class party which actively supports and seeks to recruit from all layers of the oppressed and exploited.

We should recognize that we have a good opportunity at the present time to recruit gay activists to our movement and should work to do so. Such recruitment must be on the basis of our full political program but should not be counterposed to activity in the gay liberation movement. Where gay people joining our party are involved in significant work in the gay liberation movement we have no reason to want or expect them to put such activity aside on joining our party.

Regardless of what decision is made by the coming party convention, I do not believe this will complete the task of developing a more adequate analysis of, and approach to, the gay liberation movement.

The National Committee memorandum contains a number of ambiguities and insufficiencies. This was indicated, I think, by the fact that several comrades who oppose intervention into the gay liberation movement felt that they were able to vote for it. I hope this proves to have been a misunderstanding on their part.

However, to the extent that ambiguities in the memorandum may represent hesitations or reservations on the part of the central party leadership, then we must recognize that this demonstrates the need for continuing discussion and education within the party as a whole. Such problems cannot be resolved simply by a vote.

I am not suggesting that there not be a vote at this convention. What I am trying to say is that the problem must ultimately be solved within a broader political context.

On the basis of the National Committee memorandum, I believe the central party leadership has a basically correct but insufficient position on the question of gay liberation. At the same time it is a leadership that in all



other key respects has earned my full political support. In such a situation I must see the basic problem then as one of winning them, so to speak, to my point of view on this particular question. This is a matter of a continuing exchange of views, not votes.

This is not the first time that the party is confronted with the need to develop an adequate analysis of a complex new political phenomenon. The discussions on Eastern Europe and China, ranging over a period of years, are probably the best known examples of this. These questions were resolved finally through a process of an objective, comradely exchange of views—factional opponents, of course, excepted.

Let me cite another example. When Evelyn Reed first began giving branch educationals on the question of the matriarchy and female liberation some 25 years ago, a good number of male comrades—and perhaps some females—freaked out. I don't know what the reaction of the party's central leaders was at that time. But I think

it would have created some thorny problems if she insisted on putting her full thesis to a vote.

I certainly am not suggesting that we can or should spend a quarter of a century educating the party on the issue of gay liberation. The need for intervention is pressing. Nor do I have an abstentionist point of view in relation to the principal issues involved.

I have ideas and convictions on the question and, to the best of my ability, intend to press for them.

But I consider it important that all of us approach the problem in the most sober, objective way we can.

That means neither blurring over, nor exaggerating the differences there may be between us. The goal must be clarification and arriving at common agreement. Since our party has so adequately demonstrated its revolutionary capacities, I am confident that when this question is resolved it will be in a manner consonant with our Marxist principles.

July 23, 1971

# MAJOR FLAWS IN THE THORSTAD-GREEN RESOLUTION, "FOR AN INTERVENTION INTO THE GAY LIBERATION STRUGGLE"

(Vol. 31, No. 34)

by Barry Sheppard

There are important differences in line between the resolution submitted by Comrades Thorstad and Green, "For an Intervention into the Gay Liberation Struggle," and the memorandum on the gay liberation movement adopted by the National Committee (NC) at its meeting last April. Before taking up these important differences, I would like to comment on aspects of the discussion, both as it is reflected in the Discussion Bulletin, and as it was reflected in the verbal Los Angeles branch discussion in which I participated.

Assertions have been made by supporters of the Thorstad-Green resolution that the NC memorandum's political position gives only lip service to the struggle of gay people for their full rights. Comrades Beren, Green, Keepnews, Lauritsen and Thorstad, in "Where the National Committee Memorandum on the Gay Liberation Movement Goes Wrong," even raise the following question: "If the party were asked, could it assure gays that following a successful socialist revolution in the United States under the leadership of the Socialist Workers Party a similar treatment

and policy [to the present repressive policy followed by the Cuban regime] would not await them?"

But the memorandum is crystal clear in its political position. It states that the party's position is one of "unconditional support to the struggles of homosexuals for full democratic rights, including full civil and human rights, and against all the forms of discrimination and oppression they suffer under capitalism." The party rejects all forms of prejudice and prejudiced theories against gay people, which are used as justifications to oppress them. The memorandum rejects "with contempt all forms of bourgeois prejudice against gay people, including quack psychological 'theories' labelling gays as mentally ill—prejudices echoed by the Stalinists. . . ."

Further: "The development of the gay liberation movement is progressive. It confronts and helps break down the reactionary morality that helps preserve class society. The struggle of gay people for their rights is directed against the capitalist government, and is in the interests of socialism, which can only be built by the mobilization



the working class and its allies in the historic task of rebuilding society, eliminating every vestige of discrimination spawned by class society, including the oppression of gay people. The party identifies with the aims of this struggle and supports it. . . ."

A second confusion that has been evident in the discussion is what the memorandum means when it says that where local struggles for the rights of gay people occur, the party should "support" them. The question is, does this preclude "intervention" or "participation" in such struggles, or does "support" mean strictly support from the sidelines. We will return to this question in dealing with the different lines of the memorandum and the Thorstad-Green resolution concerning our relation to the gay liberation movement at the present time. But here we will point out that the word "support" certainly does not preclude intervention or participation. Our support to such struggles where they occur can take many forms, depending upon circumstances. In some cases, the best way for us to support a given struggle would be through our election campaigns, or through an article in *The Militant*. In other situations, we would participate in a demonstration, or in a defense committee, or in a united front to organize a demonstration. It depends upon the concrete circumstances. There are no a priori, abstract prohibitions on the form our support to such struggles will take.

A third point relates to a dangerous method that has been, I believe inadvertently, introduced into the discussion. Supporters of the Thorstad-Green resolution, in the Discussion Bulletin and in the verbal discussion, have raised suspicions about what the memorandum "really" means, using gossip, quotations of what this or that person supposedly said, questioning the "real" motivation of those who voted for the memorandum, and attempting to build up the case that the memorandum represents a "compromise" with prejudice. Comrade Lee Smith's article, "Looking Backward, the SWP and Gay Liberation, 1970-1973," is an example.

By this method, the memorandum is dismissed out of hand, and an objective discussion of the real differences between its line and that of the Thorstad-Green resolution is made more difficult.

Let us now turn to three areas of difference between the line of the memorandum and the line of the Thorstad-Green resolution. These are: (1) the question of whether the party should take a position on the nature or value of homosexuality; (2) the social weight of the gay liberation movement and the related question of our general priorities in relation to it; (3) the analysis of the present stage of the gay liberation movement and our immediate tactical orientation towards it.

### 1. Should the Party Take a Position on the Nature or Value of Homosexuality?

First, we should outline the position of the memorandum. The memorandum rejects all forms of prejudice against gay people. It supports their struggle for the eradication of every aspect of the oppression they suffer, and rejects "theories" about gay people or about homosexuality that are used to justify the oppression of gay people.

But while we reject such theories, we do so on the ground that they are used to oppress gay people. We do not attempt, as a party, to put any other theory about homosexuality in the place of such theories.

The Thorstad-Green resolution insists that the party must take the position that "homosexuality is not inferior

to heterosexuality," as is made abundantly clear in the document "Where the National Committee Memorandum on the Gay Liberation Movement Goes Wrong," signed by the Comrades Thorstad and Green and others.

It is important to establish what is the difference in the two positions. The line of the memorandum is that the party stands in opposition to all forms of oppression of gay people. This implies rejection of any notion of the "inferiority" of gay people. But this does not entail taking any position on the question of homosexuality itself. The difference can perhaps be seen in the two possible interpretations of the "gay is good" slogan. One, in line with the memorandum, is that "gay people are just as good as heterosexual people." Another, on which the memorandum takes no position, but which is embraced by the Thorstad-Green resolution, is that "gayness or homosexuality is just as good as heterosexuality."

Why should the party not adopt this stand that homosexuality is just as good as heterosexuality? First of all, let us look more closely at the statement itself. What does it mean? It is capable of many interpretations.

One possible interpretation is a moral one. That is, that homosexuality is just as good in a moral sense as heterosexuality. As Marxists, we reject religious or other moral arguments against either homosexuality or heterosexuality or just sexuality. We reject such moral arguments in toto, and do not judge phenomenon by such criteria, and do not make statements about the morality of homosexuality or heterosexuality. I'm sure that all comrades agree on this.

Another possible interpretation is that by "homosexuality is just as good as heterosexuality" what is meant is that homosexual activity, desires, etc., are just as "good" or "not inferior" to heterosexual desires, acts, etc., in a clinical or physical or psychological sense. This is clearly not true in the case of most individuals presently living in our society. The vast majority of individuals in this society prefer either homosexuality or heterosexuality, think one or the other is better for them. Obviously, we are not going to make it a matter of party policy to tell people they are *wrong* to have a personal preference. The authors and key supporters of the Thorstad-Green resolution, in fact, say that this is not what they mean.

A third possibility is to assert that if there was no oppression of homosexuals, and no prejudice against homosexual acts, then homosexuality would be looked upon by humanity as not inferior to heterosexuality. There is no evidence to make any such assertion. We do not know, in a society free of distortions of sexuality and free of prejudice, whether there will continue to be a spectrum of sexual preference among the population, which preference would have the majority, or if in the case that such differentiations cease to exist, that people will not prefer, for example, heterosexual contacts over homosexual contacts. Comrades may have their own views on such questions. Some comrades even hold that sexuality itself will recede in importance over time. But the party does not take a position on such questions.

We must also place this question in the context of the real gay liberation movement, where there are many people who do assert just such interpretations of "gay is good" as these. Comrade Thorstad's and Green's protestations to the contrary, for the party to assert that "homosexuality is just as good as heterosexuality" *could only* be interpreted



as taking a position on a matter we should say is a personal decision.

Nor are we helped out of this dilemma by the answer given by Comrades Joe Johnson, Bill Perdue, and Jon Hillson that we should say that homosexuality is "natural." Of course it is "natural" in the sense that it is a natural phenomenon. Presumably, this is not what Comrades Johnson and Hillson are referring to. One assumes that they are referring to "natural" in the sense discussed above, of what sexuality will be like under a society in which distortions of sexuality, prejudices, etc., have been eliminated.

So far, we have discussed one aspect of this question, that of the difficulty of arriving at a scientifically valid conclusion on the nature or value of homosexuality. There is a more important aspect, outlined in the memorandum. That is, that the party is a *political* organization, that does not take positions on such scientific questions, or on questions of personal preference like this. Comrades Thorstad, Green, Beren, et. al. put great emphasis on this question, calling it the "central thrust" of gay liberation movement, in "Where the National Committee Memorandum on the Gay Liberation Movement Goes Wrong."

For the party to adopt a position on the question of the value of homosexuality vis-a-vis heterosexuality would be a diversion from our purpose, as the memorandum explains. It would open the door to further debates on the nature and value of homosexuality in the party, and on other questions such as the nature and value of other sexually-related activities and desires (sadism, masochism, transvestism, fetishism, etc., all of which are raised and discussed in certain sections of the gay liberation movement—see the Gay Manifesto, for example).

The party adopts *political* positions to guide its work. The memorandum makes clear what our political position is in regard to the oppression of gay people. I repeat, this *political* position includes rejection of all "theories" that are utilized to justify that oppression. Those comrades in the discussion who belittle this position as a merely "civil liberties" one because we refuse to adopt a position on the value of homosexuality, are in reality proposing that the party begin to become something other than a political organization. They would have us become a proponent of "gayness is good"—which falls outside of our political purpose.

## 2. The Social Weight of the Gay Liberation Movement

The memorandum has a section that characterizes the relative social weight of the gay liberation movement. We should first clear up a misunderstanding that resulted from the memorandum's use of the word "peripheral" in the following sentence: "In our long-term strategic priorities, the gay liberation movement is much more peripheral to the central issues of the class struggle than either the women's movement or the movements of the oppressed nationalities." We have polemicized with the FAPO grouping at our last convention, and with opponents, who dismiss the struggles that have arisen in the course of the radicalization as "peripheral" to the class struggle. We deny this, and see these movements, including the gay liberation movement, as part of the class struggle against the myriad forms of capitalist oppression. But at the same time, movements on different questions against different aspects of the oppression spawned by capitalist society do not all have the same weight in the class struggle. Nor do the issues different movements raise have the same importance in the class struggle.

The gay liberation movement raises issues that together are relatively narrow in their scope, compared to other movements. Looking at *political* issues raised by the gay liberation movement, as outlined in the Thorstad-Green resolution, for example, we find the following: (1) struggles against the antigay laws; (2) demands for equal rights legislation; (3) opposition to police harassment; (4) fights for campus recognition; (5) opposition to job discrimination; (6) opposition to theories promulgated by the psychiatric profession. The resolution also points to efforts by gays to utilize the elections to fight for their rights. As can be seen from this list itself, the scope of the issues raised is not the same as those raised by the women's movement or the movements of the oppressed nationalities, let alone the workers movement.

The memorandum, as quoted above, recognizes that the gay liberation movement "confronts and helps break down the reactionary morality that helps preserve class society." But the Thorstad-Green resolution exaggerates this aspect of the movement, as Comrade Mimi Hara has pointed out. The sexual morality of class society is only one aspect of the ideological props of class society and the gay liberation movement challenges only one aspect of this sexual morality. The movement for the repeal of abortion laws, for example, implicitly challenges reactionary sexual morality as it directly affects a wider section of the population than the gay liberation movement does.

It is true that the gay liberation movement does in some way affect every person, and the realization of any of its political goals would be a step forward for all people oppressed and exploited by capitalism. But it is directly concerned with the rights of a relatively narrow section of the population, those who are gay. While this is an insignificant section of the population, it is not as massive as the number of women, for example, or as massive as the movements of the oppressed nationalities.

More important, our understanding of the key role in the struggle of Black people in the coming American revolution is based not only on our appreciation of the numbers of Black people and other oppressed minorities but also on their class composition and urban concentration. Black people are a large sector of the industrial working class, a sector which is raising and fighting for demands which are of central importance to the class as a whole. The potential power and effect of the struggle of Black people as the largest oppressed nationality and the most combative and class-conscious sector of the working class has already been reflected in the giant ghetto rebellions and in all aspects of the class struggle as it has unfolded.

Even if we differ on the number of gays in the population, or on how many of them will become mobilized by this movement, the scope of the movement must be characterized as considerably more narrow than the women's movement and the movements of the major oppressed nationalities.

We must also add that it remains to be seen how extensively the mass of gay people will be mobilized by the gay liberation movement, although we can expect that the movement will grow and have the support of most gays.

The Thorstad-Green resolution *deletes* this whole section on the relative social weight of the movement. Thus the door is left open for considering this movement as im-



that take... important for our work as these others, for example. There is a danger in this concept of refusing to objectively consider the real scope and weight of this or any other movement, and see where it fits in the generalized class struggle. The danger is to begin to slip toward *polyvanguardist* conceptions and away from the class analysis of society and the coming revolution.

Comrade Terry Hillman correctly points out that we have to start with our class analysis of society in weighing any movement and see where it fits in. We don't just say that we support all movements against the oppression of capitalist society—we do say that, of course, but we must say more. If we don't, then we can foster the idea that the revolution will be a sort of united front of various protest movements, with the workers as the most important component, rather than our Marxist view that it will be a proletarian revolution, mobilizing all oppressed as allies of the working class.

The polyvanguardist view is not supported by the main authors and supporters of the Thorstad-Green resolution, at the whole thrust of their exaggeration of the role of the gay liberation movement, and their opposition to including a clear statement on the fact that the relative social weight of this movement is considerably less than that of the women's movement and the major oppressed nationalities, opens the door to misconceptions that can lead in this direction.

The memorandum's outline of the social weight of the gay liberation movement is needed by the party, as a general guide to our propaganda, election campaigns, and our work in general.

#### *The Present State of the Gay Liberation Movement and Our Immediate Tactical Orientation Towards It.*

The memorandum and the Thorstad-Green resolution have two opposed evaluations of the present state of the gay liberation movement. Thorstad-Green see a burgeoning movement.

But the paucity of struggles described in the Thorstad-Green resolution itself, and what has been reported about concrete struggles in last year's literary discussion on the movement, and what has been said by supporters of the Thorstad-Green resolution in this discussion, indicate that the memorandum's view of the movement is more realistic and sober. The fact is that there are not many struggles, and what struggles have occurred have been on a local basis. Where they do occur, the memorandum says that the branches should support them. We are not going to miss out on any real struggles that do occur. In this regard, we should also note that the Thorstad-Green resolution itself doesn't see big struggles with a national focus emerging in the next immediate period. As has been pointed out, "support" of such local struggles can be a wide range of things, and there is no prohibition of any form of support, such as participation, by the memorandum.

Given the current state of the gay liberation movement, the memorandum rejects a national party intervention into the movement at the present time. It indicates that the branches should not make general, standing assignments of comrades to participate in gay liberation organizations at this time. Within this framework, as and if concrete struggles occur, the branches should support them, carrying out this work in the context of the major

campaigns the party is engaged in.

Why, if the Thorstad-Green resolution itself cannot find many examples of real political struggles being carried out by the gay liberation movement at present, is there such a difference on evaluation of the present state of the movement?

I do not know the answer to this question for certain, but would speculate that it is related to the two views of the gay liberation movement that are in the memorandum and the Thorstad-Green resolution. The memorandum, in discussing the political import of the gay liberation movement, is talking about its political aspects, real struggles against the laws, against victimization of gays, for the rights of gays, etc. It rejects the view presented by Comrades Thorstad and Green that the "central thrust" or "underlying thrust" of the gay liberation movement is proving that homosexuality is just as good as heterosexuality. To the extent that this is true, it indicates a turn away from politics by the gay liberation movement.

This itself indicates how wrong the Thorstad-Green resolution is, taken as a guide to how we should intervene in this movement where that is desirable or possible. The memorandum clearly orients us to supporting real, political struggles when and if they occur in the next period. The Thorstad-Green resolution would go in the direction of participating in the movement to "prove" the statements about the value of homosexuality.

Let us take one other argument which is implied in the Thorstad-Green resolution. That is the argument that, well, maybe the movement is presently facing some problems. But if the SWP decided to vigorously intervene on a national scale in it, that would provide the necessary leadership to transform it.

Comrade Terry Hillman took up this question, and pointed out that this is not enough to decide that we should so intervene, even if true. In the first place, to think that we could by our own efforts merely step into this movement and overcome its leadership problems is dubious at best. We do not approach any movement that way. In the work we did to help build NPAC and WONAAC, for example, we saw that other significant forces were ready to move on these issues, and ready to support a united front effort. We also saw that there was a difference between the level of response to the antiwar campaign and to the abortion law repeal campaign, not because of any difference in our quality of our leadership in the two movements, but because of the different objective factors related to them. We see no immediate prospect of forming action united fronts nationally around the other issues of the women's movement at the present time (although this could rapidly change). For us to attempt to form united fronts, or to become the leadership of the gay liberation movement at this time, would most certainly fail, because the movement itself is not ready for this. And even if we grant that in certain instances we could have some modest success in mobilizing this movement, it would clearly take such effort on the part of the party as to seriously distort the priorities of the party's work in the next period.

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There is a section of the memorandum dealing with dress, certain aspects of party functions, the pressure ema-



nating from some lesbian groups that the highest form of feminism is lesbianism, and other questions. Some of these questions were raised in the literary discussion on the gay liberation movement, and are raised in the gay liberation movement itself. For these reasons, this section was included as part of the memorandum.

In the discussion, some comrades have objected to the inclusion of this section in the memorandum, feeling that it implies that gay comrades per se are more counter-culturalist than other people. This was not intended, and it should be clear (the memorandum itself states this) that this section is not about gay liberation and should be seen as dealing with a separate point. Comrades should remember that one of the purposes of the memorandum was to evaluate the points raised in the party's literary discussion, and this topic was one of those. Comrades supporting the Thorstad-Green resolution have stated that they supported the content of this section, although they object to its being included in the memorandum. It should

be made clear that the national committee, in voting this section, was voting for its content, and in no way for any implication that gay comrades or gay people in general are more prone to counter-culturalism than others, and that if the convention votes to adopt the same resolution as it now stands on this point, it should be interpreted in this sense.

Finally, we should note that the memorandum should not pretend to be a full resolution or analysis of gay liberation. It is intended to make clear our political position on the oppression of gay people; clarify our general view of the social weight of this movement to help guide our work, proportions and priorities; and outline tactical intervention in the movement at the present time in light of the real state of the movement.

The Thorstad-Green resolution, while containing many things that are good, presents a wrong line for the party and for the gay liberation movement itself.

July 29, 1971

# WHY WE MUST TAKE THE CORRECT STANDS ON GAY LIBERATION

(Vol. 31, No. 34)

by John Lauritsen, Upper West Side Branch,  
New York Local

Although an abundance of material on gay liberation has appeared in discussion bulletins over the past two years, recent discussions on gay liberation have made me aware that not even the most basic facts are yet completely understood or accepted by many comrades. Perhaps the sheer bulk of material has proved confusing—a case of not being able to see the forest for the trees.

So what I'd like to attempt is a summary of what I think is important to an understanding of gay liberation.

I'm going to give a capsule description of what I think represents a correct Marxist approach to gay liberation and what is the state of factual knowledge on the subject. And then, I'll give reasons why the party must take a forthright stand that homosexuality *per se* is not



not decadent, not depraved, and not unnatural—in sum, that a homosexual orientation is in no way less valid than inferior to an exclusively heterosexual orientation.

#### *Two ways of viewing the taboo on homosexuality*

The antihomosexuality statutes of medieval and modern times are full of such phrases as "unnatural intercourse," "unnatural crimes," "infamous crime against nature," and "abominable and detestable crime against nature." Opposing these codifications of their oppression and the premises behind them, gay liberationists have raised such slogans as "Gay Is Good." This confrontation is at the heart of the gay liberation fight. It has raised basic questions on which revolutionists must be prepared to take stands.

As Marxists we approach social questions in a particular way—with a historical perspective, a class analysis, a materialist philosophy, and a commitment to scientific objectivity, this must also be our approach for the gay liberation movement.

I think it may clarify things to take the *taboo* on homosexuality as a focal point. The taboo is easier to see in historical terms than is homosexuality itself. Whereas homosexual love has been practised in all human societies of which we have record, and among all classes and types of people, the taboo on homosexuality is a historical variable.

Broadly speaking, there are two ways one might view the taboo on homosexuality.

*Viewpoint one.* The taboo on homosexuality is an inherent and unchangeable characteristic of humankind. Something which occurs spontaneously in human society. Correspondingly, homosexuality is very likely some form of depravity, disease, or malfunction. If this view be held, then the historic persecutions of gay people, although excessive and inhumane, would nevertheless be understandable as the response of healthy people to loathsome and unnatural behavior.

or,

*Viewpoint two.* Historically, the taboo on homosexuality has not always been a part of human culture. Rather, antigay attitudes and practices are limited in time and space, and derive from particular moral traditions. These moral traditions were the result of specific forms of social and economic organization. The taboo on homosexuality is therefore not an eternal feature of human society, but a transitory historical phenomenon.

The first viewpoint reflects classic idealism, with its assumptions of unchanging human nature and "eternal truths." This first viewpoint is the one behind the antigay myths and laws of our society.

The second viewpoint is the approach for materialists. Its perspective is historical. It also happens to be fully backed up by facts, whereas there's not a scrap of evidence to support the first viewpoint.

And on a political level, the second is obviously the only approach that would lead us to solidarise ourselves with the gay liberation movement and with gay liberation, a motive force behind it.

#### *The state of knowledge about homosexuality*

How much do we know about homosexual behavior? According to the memorandum on gay liberation, not

much. The memorandum claims, "... the whole question of the scientific investigation of sexuality and the related one of psychology is still in its infancy. Especially concerning homosexuality, little is known, and it is difficult to ascertain what is objectively based and what represents prejudice in what knowledge is available."

Let's take the claim that the scientific investigation of sexuality "is still in its infancy." Obviously, "infancy" is a relative term. I am not sure what was meant by it, or indeed why it was used at all.

In my opinion we have plenty of information to take the stands that need to be taken, on a scientific basis, once the appropriate hypotheses have been formulated.

Only the rather bourgeoisified field of psychology was mentioned in the memorandum, presumably as an appropriate tool for a Marxist analysis—psychology, which by its very nature is concerned with speculation about consciousness inside individual heads. Gay liberationists justifiably consider psychiatric quacks to be enemies who provide a modern rationalization for continued oppression. Why did the memorandum not mention more objective disciplines—disciplines concerned with *practice*—such as history, anthropology, zoology, and statistical research? History, for instance, which shows that homosexuality was practised in the earliest civilizations, that it was exalted in a considerable amount of early art and literature, and that the persecution of homosexuality reached its greatest intensity in societies with a Judeo-Christian tradition? Or anthropology and ethnology, which show that many of the world's societies tolerate or encourage some forms of homosexual behavior? Or zoology, which shows that homosexual behavior can be found in every species of mammals that has been extensively studied, and that the higher one goes on the evolutionary scale, the more frequent it becomes? Or statistical research, where the massive studies of Kinsey demonstrate that homosexual responsiveness is a feature of the human animal.

#### *The class function of morality*

I'm going to jump a bit to give a quick sketch of how gay liberation fits into the class struggle, how class morality, among whose victims are gays, helps keep the rulers in power.

The concrete aspects of gay oppression are certainly as harrowing as anything in the roster of atrocities committed to uphold class rule. Even now, gays are denied basic democratic rights which virtually everyone else has, at least on paper. Gays don't legally have the right to a job, housing, the right to be in public places. Gays are potentially denied even the right to live—that is, the right not to be tortured, castrated, or lobotomised as "sexual psychopaths"; not to be imprisoned for "unnatural crimes," or not to be assaulted and blackmailed.

But beyond these very real injustices, the antigay myths serve an integral role in the prevailing ideology—the official morality—the "eternal truths"—which make people toe the line and which veil the true mysteries, the political-economic relations of capitalist society. The ramifications of gay oppression go far beyond the sexual sphere; they affect the consciousness of everyone.

Marxists do battle in the ideological sphere, as well as in arenas of immediate struggle. Our ideas are weapons in the class war. I think these passages from Trotsky's essay *Their Morals And Ours*, are a good summary



of how Marxists view morality:

"Morality is one of the ideological functions in this [class] struggle. The ruling class forces its ends upon society and habituates it into considering all those means which contradict its ends as immoral. That is the chief function of official morality. It pursues the idea of the 'greatest possible happiness' not for the majority but for a small and ever diminishing minority. Such a regime could not have endured for even a week through force alone. It needs the cement of morality . . . .

"Whoever does not care to return to Moses, Christ, or Mohammed; whoever is not satisfied with eclectic *hodge-podges* must acknowledge that morality is a product of social development; that there is nothing invariable about it; that it serves social interests; that these interests are contradictory; that morality more than any other form of ideology has a class character . . .

"The bourgeoisie, which far surpasses the proletariat in the completeness and irreconcilability of its class consciousness, is vitally interested in imposing its moral philosophy upon the exploited masses. It is exactly for this purpose that the concrete norms of the bourgeois catechism are concealed under moral abstractions patronized by religion, philosophy, or that hybrid which is called 'common sense'. The appeal to abstract norms is not a disinterested philosophic mistake but a necessary element in the mechanics of class deception. The exposure of this deceit which retains the tradition of thousands of years is the first duty of a proletarian revolutionist."

*Why we must take a stand that homosexuality is not sick, decadent, unnatural, or otherwise inferior*

For at least five reasons:

One—the FACTS. When we say that homosexual behavior is not inferior, we are making a true statement. Much of this evidence was summarised in the literary discussion, whereas no evidence against this position was offered in the entire literary discussion or in the memorandum. For any comrades who'd like to learn more, a good start would be Wainwright Churchill's *Homosexual Behavior Among Males* and Ford and Beach's *Patterns Of Sexual Behavior* (both available in paperback). The two Kinsey studies are also valuable.

Two. Not taking a stand would lead to an inadequate approach to gay liberation. It would limit the party to a civil rights approach rather than championing the aim of the gay liberation movement for full acceptance of homosexual behavior.

Three. Such a stand is necessary for us to relate to the correct slogans and demands of the gay liberation movement. To take just one slogan, "Gay Is Good" is a political statement that calls upon closeted gays to come out of their closets, to join in united struggle against oppression. Gay Is Good further represents a breaking through into consciousness of the truth — the realization that all of the sickness, depravity and decadence theories are nothing but superstitious crap without a bit of foundation in the real world. Gay Is Good is a slogan we ought to support.

Four. This stand is necessary to differentiate us completely from the Stalinists. It is common knowledge in the gay movement and among gays generally that gays are oppressed in the Soviet Union, Cuba, and other countries that call themselves "socialist." The Stalinist myths about "decadence" and that homosexuality will "with away" under socialism are also widely known. We have got to make it absolutely clear that the Stalinist myths and practices are contrary to Marxism and that we have no part of them. We should also show in our literature that Stalinist antigay practices represent a reversal of previous socialist stands. [See *The Homosexual Rights Movement (1864-1935)* by John Lauritsen and David Thorstad, SWP Discussion Bulletin Vol. 31 No. 10.]

Five. This is the very basis and starting point of a Marxist analysis.

Historically, gay people were not persecuted because of the revulsion good, decent, healthy people felt at loathsome and unnatural deeds. No. Gays were persecuted in the name of theologically derived concepts of morality. These moral concepts did not mysteriously spring out of nowhere, they were not accidents. These moral concepts originated in the interests of class rule, they acted as powerful supports for class rule, for three thousand years they have perpetuated and they continue to perpetuate class rule.

July 28, 1973

Memorandum to the Political Committee of the Socialist Workers Party  
From: David Thorstad  
Re: Resignation From Membership  
Date: December 17, 1973

I have decided to resign from membership in the Socialist Workers Party. My decision, although arrived at with great reluctance and put off with the stubbornness of those who cling to hope when that is all that is left, is made with the confidence that it is the correct one. There is, quite simply, no reasonable alternative to it.

I address this letter to the Political Committee not out of any inflated estimation of the importance of my decision as an individual member of the party. Rather, I do so because I feel that since my resignation is only one of a series of resignations (or potential



resignations) for similar reasons, it may be of some value to the PC to know a bit about the considerations that have brought me to this point.

Let me preface these considerations with the following observation. While some may judge my decision to be a reflection--or even proof--of personal weakness, I regard it as a sign of personal strength and integrity. Few, I think, could seriously question the commitment of myself and other gay comrades to revolutionary Marxism; the record speaks for itself. And until recently--certainly until the rise of the gay liberation movement--it would have been frankly unthinkable for me to leave the organization to which I had devoted my life. Yet I have come to regard commitment to homosexual liberation and membership in the Socialist Workers Party as incompatible.

The evolution of the party's approach to gay liberation since Spring 1971 has been such as to objectively drive gays from the party. Such a statement may at first appear shocking or hyperbolic. But a closer look at the history of the past three years will show that the party's attitude toward homosexual oppression and liberation (and indeed sex questions in general) has reached a point where gay comrades who are unwilling or unable to divorce their struggle against their sexual oppression from their politics are being forced to make a choice between gay liberation and revolutionary socialism. This is, to be sure, a false choice; for a Marxist, the commitment to gay liberation is inseparable from a commitment to revolutionary socialism, and vice versa. Yet the party's determination, after a fleeting flirtation with gay liberation in early 1971, to demote it from a political to an essentially personal issue, is forcing this choice upon its gay members.

Not all will choose, as I have, to leave the party. Some may even decide to remain members for basically the same reasons that I have decided not to. But all will decide. And to attempt to explain their decision to stay or to leave as simply a necessary, or even valuable, step along the road to "cadre selection" would be to fail utterly to understand either the profound nature of the conflict on a personal level or its significance from a historical point of view.

Gay liberation confronts the revolutionary movement with a historical test. It raises issues so fraught with fear and prejudice, so smothered in ignorance and superstition, and so lacking in accepted status as a cause to be championed by the left that it would be foolish to imagine that a reversal of that status could be brought about easily. But a reversal must be achieved. And I have come to the conclusion that it can be achieved best outside the SWP rather than inside it.

So far, the SWP has failed the historical test. Its elimination of the antigay policy at the end of 1970 gave reason to hope that finally a Marxist, materialist appreciation of homosexual oppression and liberation was about to prevail on the revolutionary left. I can speak about the intensity of this hope with some knowledge because I myself had all but lost it; I spent the better part of the year 1970 debating with myself whether or not, as a homosexual socialist, I should leave the party that so unconscionably oppressed its own members. I was able to maintain the dichotomy between my homosexuality and my commitment to socialism long enough to see the conflict resolved by the elimination of the policy.

The months following the removal of the policy saw the beginnings of an attempt to develop a serious, Marxist grasp of the significance of the burgeoning gay movement and of how the struggle against homo-



sexual oppression fit into the aims of the revolutionary party. Many homosexual comrades were stirred to new life, hope, and creativity by this willingness of the party to embrace gay liberation. They began to challenge the unchallengeable stereotypes about themselves, confident that the party stood behind them. They became perhaps a bit heady to see straight comrades joining them in this fight. They began, for the first time, to see evaporate the need for them to keep their homosexuality and their politics in separate compartments.

Their headiness did not last long. In just a few months, it became clear that serious obstacles were being placed in the path of such a trend. They were being placed there by a party leadership that was divided over the trend, that adopted a course of papering over differences on this issue rather than confronting backwardness and bigotry head on, and that, as time went on, became less and less candid with the ranks about the retreat that was begun in late Spring 1971. Retreat was portrayed as advance, vanishing coverage of gay liberation in the press as evidence of a decline in the gay movement, withdrawal of support as evidence of support, nonintervention as intervention, and a refusal to develop a Marxist analysis of gay oppression and liberation as the very paragon of Marxist wisdom. The 1972 literary discussion on gay liberation was itself merely a stage in a retreat that culminated in the party convention decision in August of this year. There is no need to elaborate on this process; it was amply, and accurately, described by Lee Smith in "Looking Backward: The SWP and Gay Liberation, 1970-1973" (SWP Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 31, No. 29, July 1973).

Supporters of the National Committee Memorandum on the Gay Liberation Movement sought to portray it as a pro-intervention document. Surely it would require a great deal of cynicism to defend that argument today, in view of the post-convention standstill the party has reached on gay liberation. It is a cynicism of which I find myself incapable.

The convention decision has made it impossible to recruit gay militants to the party. It has made it impossible for gays to reconcile their commitment to gay liberation with party membership. Rather, they must stay in the party in spite of such commitment. Some may wish to do so believing that the memorandum--as wretched, unscientific, and un-Marxist a document as one can imagine--will prove to be a disaster (which it will) and that the inevitable wheels of democratic centralism will bring about a rectification of the error. I hope they are proven right. I cannot say that I am as optimistic as they are, however. For, since the encouraging willingness of the party leadership in 1970 to respond to pressures from below and to reverse the policy banning gays from membership, the pendulum appears to have swung back to a point where the comrades of the PC are intent on calling the shots. Yet none of you have any credentials as experts on gay liberation--despite the pretentious character of the memorandum that the PC and NC brought to the party for adoption. In matters of homosexual oppression and liberation, you still have far more to learn from gay comrades and from the gay movement than they have to learn from you.

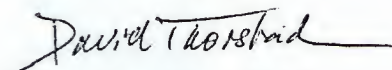
You still cling to your conception of the socialist revolution being an essentially heterosexual revolution--made of, by, and for heterosexual workers. You fear that too close an identification of the revolutionary party with gay liberation will alienate it from



the (heterosexual) masses and interfere with its ability to lead the socialist revolution. And you have tied the hands of gay comrades (and straight sympathizers) who wish to help you change your mind. You have made membership in the SWP for many members of our oppressed minority intolerable.

I am fed up with the SWP's procrastination in developing a Marxist line on gay liberation. I sincerely hope that some day it will be able to do so. It can begin by throwing its memorandum on gay liberation into the nearest trashbin. For my part, however, I believe that I can make a more useful contribution, however modest, outside of it.

Fraternally,



David Thorstad



### THE EARLY HOMOSEXUAL RIGHTS MOVEMENT (1864-1935)

JOHN LAURITSEN and DAVID THORSTAD

In 1869, in response to the impending adoption of an anti-homosexual law in Germany, a doctor named Benkert wrote an open letter of protest. Developing over the next quarter century, the first wave of the homosexual liberation movement moved into open struggle with the founding of the first gay group in 1897. The new movement actively advanced the cause of gay rights—legally, scientifically and culturally—until the 1930s when Stalinist and Nazi repression obliterated virtually all traces of it.

This pioneering book carefully uncovers the lost history of this period. The authors highlight interesting events, such as the Oscar Wilde trial, and the relationship between the gay and socialist movements around the turn of the century; additional notes on five pioneers (among them Sir Richard Burton and Edward Carpenter) are also included. This is the early history of a movement generally thought not to have an early history.

LC 74-79104; photographs, bibliography, index; 96 pp.  
Paperback; TMO27X; \$2.75

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# SWP

## "analysis"

*Gay Liberation: A Socialist Perspective*, by Kipp Dawson, Pathfinder Press, 1975, 13 pp., 35¢.

reviewed by David Thorstad

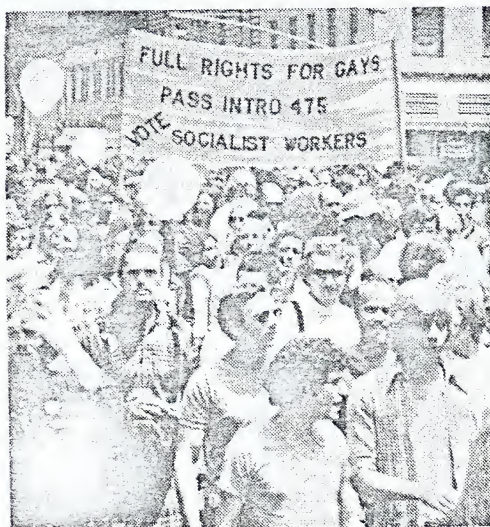
This pamphlet promises far more in its title than it delivers. Actually, it might better be retitled: *Gay Liberation: A Civil-Liberties View*. Might be, but won't be. Because the Socialist Workers Party, whose views Dawson is representing, is determined to limit its "analysis" of gay oppression and liberation to a rehashing of the obvious: that gays are oppressed, and that they need equal rights. What's more, it appears determined to present its liberal civil-liberties perspective as a socialist one. While the two necessarily overlap in some areas, they are nonetheless not at all synonymous.

Here are two statements that sum up Dawson's analysis: "The demands and goals of the gay liberation movement are for basic democratic rights"; "The central core of the gay liberation movement is the fight for full dignity for all human beings without regard to their sexual orientation." (Emphasis in original.) These are statements with which even bourgeois liberals (some of whom do believe in civil-liberties, democratic rights, and dignity) can by and large agree. It is not enough to believe, as both Dawson and I do, that only socialism can make these aims a reality. Nor is it correct to elevate, as she does, current (or past) civil-rights struggles to the status of being the "central core" of what the movement is all about. To do so distorts the reality of gay liberation, which is a multifaceted struggle to destroy the exclusive heterosexual norm of capitalist society (as well as the institutions that foster and perpetuate it — i.e., the family, monogamy, marriage, religion, sex roles, the police, the schools, the law, and so on), and to free the suppressed sexual potential of everybody, including the potential for love and sex with persons of the same (as well as the opposite) sex. Obviously, this involves much more than a civil-liberties struggle. It also means that one must be able to take a forthright stand on the notion that Gay Is Good. This, for reasons too involved to go into here at any length, the SWP refuses to do.

This pamphlet contains no socialist analysis

whatever, and merely limits itself to making the tried and true observation that socialism will bring about a world "where sexuality, along with all forms of human potential, can be freed from the dark closets of fear, intimidation, and repression." It ends on the sectarian note of urging gays to fight for liberation by joining the SWP and its youth group, the Young Socialist Alliance. This is not only sectarian, it is hypocritical, since it omits any mention of the fact that the SWP has abstained from active participation, on even a limited scale, in the gay liberation movement since mid-1971. It has more important work to do — which is one reason why its pamphlet is so thin.

Nowhere will one find here even the usual list of struggles in which the SWP and the YSA have played a role (there are no such gay struggles); nowhere any advice on priorities, strategy, or tactics for gay liberation (aside from a general, and correct, backing for an "effort to educate and mobilize the support of the majority of people"); nowhere a discussion of real issues



SWP's contribution to gay liberation — a banner and a pamphlet

within gay liberation (such as lesbian separatism, civil-rights struggles as a tactical focus, or the stranglehold over the movement by reformist and establishment-oriented groups, and how to break it). The SWP has nothing to offer on crucial questions like these.

The closest it comes to grappling with these kinds of problems is in a few paragraphs devoted to exposing the hypocrisy of liberal capitalist politicians who seek to portray themselves as the savior who will lead gays out of the wilderness of social ostracism and oppression. Such analysis

is especially timely in 1976, when no small number of gay "leaders" (Elaine Noble, *The Advocate*, the National Gay Task Force, et al.) are busy beating the drums for working within the oppressor's system. Yet, coming as it does from a group that abstains from the real struggle of gay liberation, criticism of capitalist politicians' efforts to co-opt gay liberation sounds distinctly hollow. All the more so in that it is not combined in any way with a socialist analysis of gay oppression and liberation that might offer an alternative. In reality, the SWP's civil-libertarian approach is virtually indistinguishable from that of the capitalist politicians it castigates. Neither they nor the SWP make an issue out of their verbal "support" to gay rights when speaking to nongay audiences; neither is involved in actual struggle; and neither wants too close an identification with gay liberation, for fear of alienating the vast bloc of voters (or workers), who are, of course, presumed to be inveterate (if not bigoted) heterosexuals whose consciousness in such matters lags far behind that of the "vanguard."

Some gays, especially in Europe, may feel that a pamphlet like this, whatever its shortcomings, is to be welcomed, since so little of what has been written on homosexuality on the left goes beyond the traditional Stalinist view that homosexuality is a "product of bourgeois decadence," or at best a "petty-bourgeois phenomenon." Yet this pamphlet, published finally some two years after the SWP first decided to publish a pamphlet on gay liberation, represents a step backward for the SWP compared to early 1971, when I and others were doing more in the party's own press than merely cataloguing examples of gay oppression and then tacking on a final "socialism is the answer" conclusion. The reason for this delay is that this pamphlet is supposed to present the party's view of gay liberation — yet the official position, which has never been made public by the party, is so bad that to put it in print would first require considerable sifting and filtering. (Among other things, this position dismisses gay liberation as "peripheral to the central issues of the class struggle," suspends judgment on whether or not homosexuality can be expected to "wither away under socialism," and refuses to recognize that homosexual behavior is a natural and healthy component of the human animal.) This pamphlet apparently represents the final distillation of that no doubt complicated purification process. (For more on the SWP's position, see my article, "Gay vs. SWP," *Gay Liberator*, Dec. 1974-Jan. 1975.)

[David Thorstad is president of New York's Gay Action Alliance, and is co-author, with John Lauritsen, of *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864-1935)*, published by Times Change Press, \$2.75.]



## GLOSSARY OF A FEW TROTSKYIST TERMS

to build (a struggle) - to help advance the aims of, and organize support for and participation in, a struggle.

counterculturalism - a consciously antipolitical outlook that sees social change in purely personal terms (as in the "turn on, drop out" and "do your own thing" youth culture of the 1960s).

democratic demands - demands for basic democratic rights that should have been granted by the bourgeois revolutions of the 18th-19th centuries, but which capitalism has not met (equal rights for Blacks, women, gays, national minorities, etc.). Theoretically, these demands can be met under capitalism, but in reality, winning them requires determined struggle by the oppressed and tends to produce an anticapitalist consciousness among the oppressed.

economism (adj.: economist) - the mechanistic view of some on the left that workers' struggles around economic issues (bread-and-butter demands) provide the primary impulse for social change, and should therefore be given priority in the program and activities of revolutionists to the exclusion of other struggles. Economism and workerism tend to go hand in hand.

Fourth International - the world party of the Trotskyist movement.

to intervene (noun: intervention) - to participate in a struggle with a program.

LTF - Leninist Trotskyist Faction (a political faction within the world Trotskyist movement in which the SWP plays a leading role); formerly the Leninist Trotskyist Tendency (LTT). The LTF is a minority faction struggling against some of the ideas and policies of the International Majority Tendency (IMT) within the Fourth International.

polyvanguardism - a concept that social change will be made by a coalition of separate interest groups, in contrast to the Leninist conception that the revolution will be made by the working class under the leadership of its revolutionary party; according to this view, a revolutionary party should be a mere clearing-house for, and coordinator of, many independent struggles for social change, rather than the representative and combative instrument of the interests of the most advanced sectors of the working class. During the 1973 discussion on gay liberation inside the SWP, the party leadership attempted, in vain, to tag supporters of the Thorstad-Green resolution with "polyvanguardism."

the radicalization - a reference to the phenomenon, begun in the 1960s, of young people especially--but also Blacks, women, gays, workers, and so on--seeking radical solutions to social problems and oppression. This phenomenon has produced some of the biggest social upheavals and questioning of capitalist values since the big radicalization of the 1930s.



SMC - Student Mobilization Committee (an antiwar group)

transitional demands - demands that by their very nature challenge the fundamental structures of capitalism and which call into question capitalist property and privilege. For example: Black Control of the Black Communities; Workers' Control of Production; For a Labor Party; Open the Books of the Corporations.

workerism (adj.: workerist) - a tendency to regard the struggles and issues of organized (unionized) workers as the only valid ones for revolutionists to pay attention to; its advocates tend to dismiss any other struggle (by women, homosexuals, students, opposition to the Vietnam war, and so on) as "petty-bourgeois" and "peripheral" to the efforts of the revolutionary movement. This was essentially the view of two tendencies within the SWP in the early 1970s--the For A Proletarian Orientation Tendency (FAPO) and its inheritor the Internationalist Tendency (IT). The SWP's present position on gay liberation also in some measure reflects a concession to this outlook.

workers' state - a post-capitalist state, in transition to socialism (the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, Eastern Europe, etc.).